EXCLUSIVE: BEN EDWARDS

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MOTORSPORT NEWS

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The Formula 1 commentator and racer tackles the MN readers' questions head on p14

Mercedes man says pressure from Red Bull will complicate his bid for an eighth World crown

BAHRAIN GP WINNER LEWIS HAMILTON BRACED FOR 'TOUGHEST' F1 SEASON YET

Hamilton fended off Verstappen

By Matt James

World champion Lewis Hamilton has acknowledged the threat from rival team Red Bull and its driver Max Verstappen after victory at a thrilling season-opener in Bahrain on Sunday.

The Mercedes man won his 96th race in the desert but had to endure a strategic tussle with Verstappen. The Dutchman actually took the lead with four laps to go but was forced to hand the place back as he had completed the move off the circuit.

Hamilton said he had predicted that victory in the opening race – only the third time he had claimed the F1 curtain raiser win – would be a difficult task.

"Max was all over me at the end and I was just about able to hold him off. That was one of the hardest races I've had for a while," said Hamilton.

Despite missing out on the win, Verstappen said he was happy with the performance: "We are really taking the fight to them, and I think that's great to start the year like that."

Full story, page 4

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COMMENT

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Verstappen was unlucky to lose out on his chance of victory in the opening grand prix

RED BULL SETS OUT ITS STALL

Formula 1 returned with a bang in Bahrain and it seems like it will be a genuinely competitive season. Max Verstappen might not have quite been able to dominate in the desert, but he and the Red Bull team gave it a mighty good try. The portents for 2021 look mouth-watering.

Verstappen's decision – although prompted by a call from race control – to hand back the hard-won lead with four laps to go showed a great deal of maturity.

So often it has been the case where instructions like that have been ignored, the cars have crossed the line in the order they were on track and the arguments are then played out in the officials' room afterwards. That would have been a highly unsatisfactory end to what had been a firecracker of a race.

But Max gave the place back and swallowed his pride, and grand prix racing was better for it. Given the pace shown by the Honda-powered car, his chance will come later on this year. Hamilton is going to have a fight on his hands to maintain top spot, and that is exactly what grand prix motor racing needs after years of a silver steamroller from Mercedes. This could be the dawn of a bright new era with two supremely talented drivers going toe-to-toe for top spot. Bring it on.

While the Formula 1 circus congregated in the desert, one of the notable absentees from the paddock was commentator Ben Edwards. Instead of rushing around and getting the latest gossip, he instead spent his time answering the Motorsport News readers' questions. He offers a fascinating insight into his life behind the microphone and his battle to reach the top, which almost perfectly mirrors the struggles he would have had should his single-seater racing career have continued.

Elsewhere in this issue, we couldn't help but have a sideways look at some of motor racing's more whacky ideas – after all, this issue date is April 1. That isn't a prank, but some of the innovations that organisers, designers and team bosses came up with might have been thought of as such when they first emerged. We pick out eight of our favourites which actually came to fruition.

Luke Barry looks at the shift away from running World Rally Cars in the UK and the increasing desire to run the more up-to-date R5 machines. Not only that, the global scene is changing too with a new FIA pyramid of progression, and Graham Lister guides us through the new-look structure

Matt James
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MOTORSPORT NEWS

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RACING NEWS

MAX READY TO STEP UP DESPITE DEFEAT IN BAHRAIN GRAND PRIX

Dutchman optimistic about taking the title fight to Lewis Hamilton

Max: Lessons to be learned

Photos: Motorsport Images

Max Verstappen was able to fight toe-to-toe with World champion Lewis Hamilton

By Matt James

Red Bull star Max Verstappen says that his team will learn the lessons from his defeat in Bahrain last weekend and come out even stronger for the remainder of the season.

The Dutch star, running on preferable harder tyres, hunted down leader Lewis Hamilton over the closing stages of the opening grand prix of the season and made a pass into Turn 4. However, the Honda-powered car ran off the circuit and Verstappen was forced to back off and allow the Mercedes to retake the initiative. Verstappen was unable to mount a further attack in the remaining laps and crossed the line just 0.7 seconds behind Hamilton.

The second-placed finisher said that he would work with the strategy boffins at Red Bull to try to defeat Mercedes in the future, but he added that he was delighted with the increase in competitiveness from his car.

Verstappen said: "We'll have to analyse what we could have done better, maybe. We didn't have the tyres like [Merc] had so we didn't really have a lot of flexibility in the strategy. So maybe also there we could have done better in choosing our tyres throughout the practice.

"[But] last year we would have been super-happy with this result and now we are disappointed, so we definitely made a good step forward and of course it is still a very long season. We just have to get on with it and try to do better."

Hamilton added that he too was looking forward to a gloves-off battle with Verstappen – and his team-mate Valtteri Bottas, who finished third.

The seven-time champion said: "I'm super excited and super happy for the fans, that they are excited [too]. I think it's something that all the fans have wanted for a long time. Of course, this is only one race, so we don't know what the future holds in terms of the pace they have, they could be ahead a lot more, but we're going to work as hard as we can to try and stay close in this battle and I hope for many more of these sorts of races with Max and Valtteri."

Behind Bottas, Lando Norris claimed a competitive fourth place for McLaren in the first race back with a Mercedes-Benz powerplant, while Sergio Perez, who had been forced to start from the pitlane after a technical problem on the warm-up lap with his Red Bull, climbed back through the pack for fifth spot. Charles Leclerc was sixth in the leading Ferrari.

Results

1 Lewis Hamilton 1h32m03.897s; 2 Max Verstappen (Red Bull-Honda) +0.745s; 3 Valtteri Bottas (Mercedes) +37.383s; 4 Lando Norris (McLaren-Mercedes) +46.466s; 5 Sergio Perez (Red Bull-Honda) +52.047s; 6 Charles Leclerc (Ferrari) +59.090s; 7 Daniel Ricciardo (McLaren-Mercedes) +1m06.004s; 8 Carlos Sainz (Ferrari) +1m07.100s; 9 Yuki Tsunoda (AlphaTauri-Honda) +1m25.692s; 10 Lance Stroll (Aston Martin-Mercedes) +1m26.713s. **Points:** 1 Hamilton 25; 2 Verstappen 18; 3 Bottas 16; 4 Norris 12; 5 Perez 10; 6 Leclerc 8. **Next race:** Emilia Romagna Grand Prix, Imola, Italy, April 18

ALONSO CONTENTED WITH ALPINE FORMULA 1 DEBUT

Two-time World champion Fernando Alonso said that he enjoyed his Formula 1 return with Alpine and had a fun race until he was forced to retire with overheating brakes just beyond the halfway point.

The Spaniard made it into Q3 on Saturday and lined up in ninth position and was running in 16th place when he had to pit to retire the car.

The 39-year-old said: "We had some brake issues at the end that stopped us seeing the chequered flag. Apparently some debris came into the brake duct, which is a little bit unfortunate.

"The race was fun until that point. The start, the first couple of laps, some battles with my old colleagues and I did enjoy it. But I'm disappointed not to see the chequered flag."

Alonso said it was fun to battle with his "old colleagues"

Zhou put on a late-race charge in the feature race to claim Formula 2 success

ZHOU KICKS OFF F2 CAMPAIGN IN STYLE WITH FEATURE RACE SUCCESS

Chinese driver Guanyu Zhou took his second career Formula 2 win in the feature race in Bahrain to lead the championship after the opening meeting of the season.

Zhou started the race on the harder tyres and switched to the softer Pirells, but a mid-race safety car caused the order to shuffle and put Richard Verschoor ahead. However, after Zhou's tyres sparked into life he retook the lead. Brit Dan Ticktum was second for Carlin despite late-race contact with Oscar Piastri. Kiwi Liam Lawson was third.

Lawson and fellow Red Bull driver Jehan Daruvala fought out the win in the opening sprint event. Lawson, driving for Hitech GP, shot from third on the grid to the front on the first lap and controlled the race to finish just under a second ahead of his Carlin rival. David Beckmann took third place for Charouz Racing.

Piastri won a dramatic second sprint clash on Saturday after taking a late-race gamble to put for new tyres on his Prema Racing car. The reigning FIA F3 champion blasted back through the back to claim the win. Christian Lundgaard placed second.

Lawson is second in the standings, 11 points adrift of Zhou, with Ticktum in fifth position. The next rounds take place at Monaco on May 21-22.

BRITON RUSSELL JOINS BOARD ON F1'S DRIVERS' SAFETY UNION

Williams driver George Russell has been appointed as one of the directors of the Grand Prix Drivers' Association, the body which has an input into the safety measures that are in place in Formula 1.

The Briton replaced Romain Grosjean, who has left Formula 1 to compete in IndyCar in 2021. Russell is joins chairman Alex Wurz and fellow director, four-time World champion Sebastian Vettel. The GDPA has also appointed Anastasia Fowle, its legal secretary, as a director.

Russell added: "I appreciate the support of my fellow drivers in entrusting this role to me and recognise the responsibility it entails. In its six decades in existence, the GPDA has been an integral part of supporting and shaping F1 safety, for the sport and our fans.

"I am looking forward to tackling the new challenges and opportunities alongside Anastasia, Sebastian and Alex."

TICKTUM CONTINUES HIS ROLE WITH WILLIAMS IN F1 SQUAD

Williams Racing has confirmed that Briton Dan Ticktum will remain with the team in a development driver role through 2021.

The 21-year-old joined the British team last year and took part in a simulator programme to help the squad with car upgrades and was also part of the team trackside where possible.

The Formula 2 driver, who was a race winner last term, has joined Carlin for F2 this year and will carry the Williams Driver Academy logos on his car.

Ticktum said: "It will be fun to get more time trackside this year as last year was difficult, so it will be nice to get more involved. I am looking forward to continuing my support and I am very focused."

Ticktum's job

Jack Aitken also remains with the team as its test and reserve driver. He stepped into George Russell's cockpit last season at the Sakhir GP when Russell was called up to Mercedes.

Dumfries won Le Mans

LE MANS WINNER JOHNNY DUMFRIES PASSES AWAY

Grand prix driver Johnny Dumfries passed away last week at the age of 62 after a short illness.

The 7th Marquess of Bute, John Crichton-Stuart raced under the name Johnny Dumfries and began his career in the nursery slopes of single-seater racing in the early 1980s. He won the British F3 title in 1984 before graduating to Formula 3000 with Onyx.

He grabbed the chance to jump into F1 in 1986 as team-mate to Ayrton Senna at the Lotus-Renault team and he scored two top six finishes on his way to 13th in the championship standings.

The Scot was probably best known for his success at Le Mans in 1988, sharing a Jaguar XJR-9LM with Andy Wallace and Jan Lammers. He was in demand in sportscars, having also raced with Sauber and Toyota too.

A statement from his family said: "The spirit and energy which Johnny brought to his life will be greatly missed, and the immense warmth and love with which he embraced his family. His heart was firmly rooted on the Island of Bute where he spent much of his time. Johnny chaired the Board of Mount Stuart Trust from its active inauguration in 2005 when Mount Stuart and its gardens opened to the public, and its rural estate was vested into the charitable trust.

"He was a moderniser and an inspirational thinker, transitioning a family home to a progressive, working visitor facility and estate."

Photos: Jakob Ebrey

ELMS champion continues his racing return in GT Cup

Lancaster pairs with Mason (l)

GP2 RACE-WINNER JON LANCASTER RETURNS TO UK RACING IN GT CUP

The ELMS champion continues his racing comeback with Greystone GT McLaren outings

By Graham Keilloh

GP2 race-winner and European Le Mans Series champion Jon Lancaster will continue his racing comeback this year in GT Cup alongside rookie Rich Mason for the Greystone GT team.

Lancaster returned to competition last year in ELMS after a gap since 2015 when he claimed the ELMS crown.

Now alongside Mason he will race a third McLaren 570S GT4 for noted test and track day operation Greystone GT, which expands into racing this year, in GT Cup's GTH class.

Lancaster told Motorsport News: "Doing the ELMS last year was great to get back in, I've still got plenty of pace. Everything I did compared to [co-driver Loic] Duval was the same or better.

"This opportunity came around October last year. I met Rich, the Greystone guys, and we got on fantastic.

"Rich has great passion for going racing just like myself. [As] he's an adopted Yorkshire we have a lot in common! So it was a bit of a no brainer.

"It's nice to get the opportunity to race in the UK because I haven't done it since 2006! Relive a bit of youth!"

Lancaster and Mason have entered Donington Park's April season-opener and hope to appear in further rounds in 2021. "Rich has work commitments so unfortunately we'll miss a couple," Lancaster added.

"We want a nice progression throughout the year and we'll see where that leads on to 2022. We're dreaming of a podium but competition looks pretty tough."

Junior Scot contest soon

SCOTLAND SET FOR FIRST JUNIOR RACING CHAMPIONSHIP IN 2022

The Scottish Motor Racing Club is set to launch Scotland's first Junior Motor Racing Championship in 2022, after receiving approval in principle from Motorsport UK.

A maximum of four junior championships are permitted in the UK, and the new Scottish championship will be for those aged 14-17. Interested parents or guardians can register interest now. Full technical details, including the choice of car, will follow in a more detailed proposal to Motorsport UK.

SMRC chairman Vic Covey Jr said: "To date, the opportunity to start circuit racing has never been available for young people in Scotland, unless they have the time and substantial budget to travel further afield.

"We believe this initiative can create an accessible, fun and productive environment for more young drivers to get started in Scottish motor racing."

STUDENT TEAM JOINS SCOTTISH FF1600 GRID

Student team West College Scotland Motorsport Academy will join the Scottish Formula Ford 1600 grid this year.

The squad is a partnership between the Scottish Motor Racing Club, West College Scotland and the Scottish Motor Trade Association. It has competed in the Scottish C1 Cup for the past two years and also races in Minis.

WCSMA's FF1600 car will be piloted by Glenn Alcock, who has represented the team for the past two seasons in C1 Cup and had one 2019 FF1600 outing.

The college's Patrick McGroarty said: "We at WCSMA have only one mission and that is to promote motorsport in Scotland and we have introduced not only our students but three new drivers to date, with more to come – watch this space!"

West College Scotland team to race FF1600 car

F4 set for even more action with fully reversed grids

F4 FULLY REVERSED GRIDS GET DRIVERS' THUMBS UP

British Formula 4 drivers have given their thumbs up to this year's introduction of fully reversed grids.

The weekend's second race will reverse the entire grid based on qualifying times, rather than as before 50% of race one's classified finishers being reversed.

JHR debutant McKenzy Cresswell said: "I'm a bit nervous to be honest but it's definitely going to be fun, great racing in F4, always has been, and it's definitely going to a very good race for the fans. So I'm excited about it; I'm looking forward to doing some overtaking hopefully."

Carlin rookie Dougie Bolger added: "Only speed is not going to be key to win, you have to manage tyres, same time as you have to go forward as well. You can't afford to crash and lose points. The most cleverest will win but at the same time you need to keep your speed up. It is a hard challenge but that's what fans will like."

Bolger's team-mate Kai Askey added: "It's not too different from some karting since they do mixed grids as well, it's mainly racecraft [that will determine who prevails]."

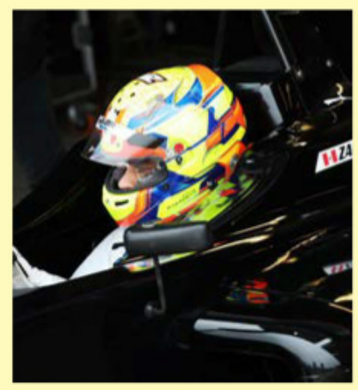
IN BRIEF

Button team ditches DTM

Team Rocket RJN, the squad co-owned by Jenson Button, will not go ahead with its DTM entry this year. The team announced in December it would race a McLaren 720S as the German series switches to GT3 regulations, but for now the team will focus on GT World Challenge Europe and British GT. It still hopes to join DTM in 2022.

Howard's way

Castle Combe is set for bumper grids at its season-opening Howard's Day meeting this Easter Monday. As Motorsport News closed for press, 32 were entered for its Hot Hatch series, 25 for the Saloon championship, 22 for Formula Ford and 20 for the GT contest . All three reigning Combe champions – Mark Sutton, Luke Cooper and Tony Bennett – are entered, as is reigning FF1600 Walter Hayes Trophy winner Oliver White.



Zagazeta in F4 title hunt

RETURNING ZAGAZETA AND BILINSKI EXPECT F4 TITLE PUSH

British Formula 4 returnees Matias Zagazeta and Roman Bilinski both expect to fight for the championship crown this season.

Zagazeta and Bilinksi along with JHR's Abbi Pulling are the only drivers from 2020's championship confirmed as returning to the category this year as Motorsport News went to press.

Peru's Zagazeta said: "Last season was very difficult but we're here to take advantage of all the experience gained last year. The main goal [is to] try and go for the championship. I'm working four times harder than last year."

Zagazeta – who switches from the Carlin team to Argenti for 2021 – added: "I saw Argenti as a very new team and they're very ambitious. I thought they would be a great fit. Michael [Meadows, team boss] knows everything and runs the team perfectly."

Bilinski – who moves from Arden to Carlin for this campaign – said as a returnee he feels expectation to fight for the title: "For sure, especially being with a team like Carlin and the records they hold," he said. "Yeah, 100% [I feel more prepared for year two]. Always since I started racing we've been on the back foot just because I started racing so late, I've only done three years. Coming back to a second season will be really good for me."

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RACING NEWS

Photos: Gary Hawkins, Jakob Ebrey, Tapio Honkanen, Graham Holbon, Gary Paravani (Xynamic)

Jewiss in Team Parker 911

Jewiss is back racing after dropping out mid last year

BRITISH TEENAGE TALENT JEWISS RETURNS TO RACING IN PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

Dominant F4 champion is latest to sign up to BTCC support category and wants the title

By Graham Keilloh

British Formula 4 champion Kiern Jewiss will return to competition this year in Porsche Carrera Cup GB driving for multiple title-winner Team Parker Racing.

Jewiss, 18, claimed the F4 crown in his rookie 2018 season with a record-breaking number of points and podium finishes and that year became a McLaren Autosport BRDC Award finalist. He then took two race wins in the BRDC British F3 championship before dropping out of that category midway through last year. Jewiss also is a BRDC Rising Stars member.

Jewiss now joins returning champion Harry King at Team Parker in Carrera Cup's Pro class, plus team-mates Ryan Ratcliffe in Pro-Am and Justin Sherwood and Justin Armstrong in Am. With British Touring Car Championship star and twice Carrera Cup champion Dan Cammish also racing in the contest this year with Redline Racing it promises to be a thrilling season.

Jewiss said: "The Porsche championship is very competitive, and with the calibre of drivers on the grid it really feels like a natural step up from the BRDC British F3 championship. Porsche has created a very attractive package with its prizes and potential progression, too.

"It was a simple decision to join Team Parker Racing with the success they had last year and my target is pretty straightforward, to win the title! Having Harry alongside me in the team will be a challenge but also a great reference."

YOUNG GT RACER HUTCHINSON GETS DUAL AUDI CAMPAIGN

BRDC Rising Star Finlay Hutchison has joined top Audi Sport squad Sainteloc Racing for 2021's GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup and Intercontinental GT Challenge in stellar driver selections.

The 21-year-old Scot will partner with Audi factory drivers Markus Winkelhock and Frederic Vervisch in the Endurance Cup. British GT4 race-winner Hutchison, who also won the Dubai 24 Hours in class aged just 16, already teamed up with Winkelhock in this January's Dubai 24 Hours and Abu Dhabi 6 Hours. The duo will again race together in 2021's Intercontinental GT Challenge alongside another factory driver to be confirmed. Hutchison also tested last week at Paul Ricard.

Hutchison said: "Over the last couple of seasons I've gained some very good experience racing Audis in GT World Challenge Europe, and I'm looking forward to putting everything I've learned to good use with the guys at Sainteloc. I couldn't wish for two better team-mates."

Hutchison in stellar line-up

Lidsey (r) is back on the Nordschleife

LIDSEY BACK IN NORDSCHLEIFE CONTEST

Clio Cup race-winner Brett Lidsey got his 2021 season underway last Saturday at the Nordschleife after re-signing with Sorg Rennsport for the nine-round Nurburgring Endurance Series.

Lidsey had his maiden season in the championship last year with Sorg Rennsport, also Lidsey's first full campaign outside the UK and first with rear-wheel drive, and took his freshman class podium last August in the season-ending six-hour race. For 2021 the Kent racer again partners Russian Ivan Berets in a BMW M240i.

Friday practice was Lidsey's first mileage since August after testing was cancelled due to snow.

Lidsey said ahead of the four-hour season-opener: "With the experience I gained last year, the fact we know the car inside-out as well, I really am feeling confident. We were getting quicker and more competitive throughout last season, we were sure the first win was only a matter of time."

EX-HAKKINEN FORMULA FORD CAR UP FOR SALE

A Formula Ford Reynard 86F raced by two-time Formula 1 world champion Mika Hakkinen in his formative years is up for sale. Hakkinen in 1987 took the car to the title in the Finnish, Swedish and Nordic championships, while the previous year it was raced by JJ Lehto, another Finn who would go on to race in F1, in the Finnish, Nordic and European contests. The car has been restored by Makela Auto Tuning and since this has been in private car museum.

Mickel is among returnees

MULTIPLE CHAMPION MICKEL BACK ON 30-PLUS LEGENDS GRID

Five-time Legends Cars National champion John Mickel and multiple race-winner Jack Parker have both confirmed their participation in 2021's contest, in a grid that has broken the 30 barrier.

A latest batch of 12 entries has been unveiled, taking the total to 31. The recruits also include 2000 champion Robin Fountain and multiple Masters Cup class title-winner Paul Simmons.

Championship owner Phil Cooper said: "[The entry] number could yet increase further. I genuinely think this year's grid is going to be one of the absolute best we've ever enjoyed as we head into our 27th season of Legends Cars racing in the UK."

Baldwin (23) recovered to victory

BALDWIN HAS SPIN AND WIN IN BRITISH GT ESPORTS ROUND 2

Not even being tapped into a lap-one spin by his Team Rocket RJN team-mates derailed James Baldwin's Snetterton British GT esports championship.

With 15kg of ballast on his McLaren from his Oulton Park season opener second place, Baldwin took pole and led but dropped to third after lap one contact with Michael O'Brien and Alex Buncombe at Wilson.

Worse though befell Oulton winner Angus Fender whose Century Motorsport BMW M6 was turned around by Sandy Mitchell's Barwell Lamborghini. Fender was 27th at the end of the opening lap and was heading for seventh until he became embroiled with Bobby Trundley's Team Brit Aston Martin Vantage and copped a 30-second penalty post-race. It translated to eighth place.

As O'Brien led, the damage he sustained on lap one started to tell and Baldwin eased by to pull away by over 23 seconds.

The GT4 race was full of drama. George Boothby, in a SideMax Motorworks Aston Martin, took pole and wasn't headed, even stretching his gap after a rapid pitstop. Jack McIntyre's Zansho Rocket Simsport Porsche 718 ran second before the pit window but lost five seconds to Boothby, allowing Nils Naujoks in a G2 Esports BMW M4 to jump by. The pair ran nose-to-tail and McIntyre got ahead at the last when Naujoks tangled with Adam Morgan's Ciceley Motorsport Mercedes.

David Addison

RESULTS

1 James Baldwin (McLaren 720S GT3) 1h01m14.825s; 2 Michael O'Brien (McLaren 720S GT3) +23.670s; 3 Ben Green (BMW M6 GT3); 4 Morgan Short (McLaren 720S GT3); 5 Jody Fannin (Ferrari 488 GT3); 6 Sandy Mitchell (Lamborghini Huracan GT3); 7 Liam McNeilly (McLaren 720S GT3); 8 Angus Fender (BMW M6 GT3); 9 Bobby Trundley (Aston Martin V8 Vantage GT3); 10 Ross Gunn (Aston Martin V8 Vantage GT3). Class winners: Baldwin and George Boothby (Aston Martin Vantage AMR GT4).

STANDINGS

GT3

POS	DRIVER	PTS
1	James Baldwin	43
2	Angus Fender	29
3	Ben Green	27
4	Jody Fannin	25
5	Morgan Short	20
6	Michael O'Brien	18
7	Sam Neary	10
8	Sandy Mitchell	8
9	Andrew Watson	6
10	Liam McNeilly	6

11 Tom Canning 4; 12 Bobby Trundley 4; 13 Jonny Adam 1; 14 Ross Gunn 1

GT4

POS	DRIVER	PTS
1	Nils Naujoks	30
2	Jack McIntyre	30
3	Luka Berk	25
4	George Boothby	25
5	Maciej Malinowski	18
6	Chris Hoeke	16
7	Michael Kundakcioglu	16
8	Moritz Lohner	10
9	Maxime Batifoulier	8
10	Egor Ogorodnikov	8

11 11 Ivan Shermetinskii 7; 12 Samir Ibraimi 6; 13 Chris McDade 2; 14 Eamonn Murphy 1

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RALLY NEWS

CREIGHTON TO GRAB CHANCE WITH JUNIOR WRC CAMPAIGN IN '21

Irish up-and-comer William Creighton will step up to the Junior WRC this season, telling Motorsport News it's "the biggest thing" he's ever done.

Creighton, 23, will be co-driven by Liam Regan in M-Sport Poland's one-make series for Ford Fiesta Rally4s. Having contested the Junior BRC for three seasons, Creighton has secured a return to the World championship – which he's contested twice before – with support from the Motorsport Ireland Rally Academy.

Although he has experience of the Ypres Rally from the BRC, the events in Croatia, Portugal, Estonia and Spain will be new to him.

"Expectations are only starting to cross my mind now," Creighton said. "We need to get to the end of the rallies to pick up experience and to pick up points. My mum competed in the Olympics for Ireland in eventing, so she's represented Ireland at a high level and now I'm going to be able to get to do it. To compete at a World level in any type of event is huge," Creighton added. "I've got to try and enjoy and give it my best."

Scholarship drivers Estonian Robert Virves and Finn Lauri Joona will be among Creighton's rivals in the JWRC. Creighton's last international appearance was on the 2020 ERC season-opening Rally di Roma Capitale in Italy. He prepared for his JWRC bid on last weekend's Czech championship Valasska Rally in a Fiesta Rally4.

Creighton to join JWRC

SAFARI BOSSES PUSHING ON FOR 2021 DESPITE PANDEMIC FEARS

The boss of Kenya's motorsport governing body says he remains "optimistic" the Safari Rally will go ahead in June despite the country's president issuing directives restricting movement in several major counties, including Nairobi, and banning sporting events.

After axing a Kenyan national event scheduled for last weekend, Phineas Kimathi confirmed that the Equator Rally, a round of the African championship from April 23-25, is "subject to talks with all stakeholders".

Commenting on Kenya's hoped-for World Rally Championship return from June 24-27, Kimathi said: "We remain optimistic that the pandemic will be supressed allowing the uninterrupted hosting of the WRC Safari Rally Kenya."

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com, Jakob Ebrey

The Acropolis Rally will make a return to the WRC line-up

ACROPOLIS WELCOMED BACK ONTO THE WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP CALENDAR AFTER 2021 REJIG

Rally Chile gets the axe as classic Greek event fills the void on the WRC line-up in September

By Graham Lister

M-Sport boss Malcolm Wilson has welcomed the Acropolis Rally's return to the WRC following an eight-year absence.

The Greek event was announced as the replacement for Rally Chile last week after the South American round was called off due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Although Wilson underlined his disappointment that the WRC won't be returning to the city of Concepcion as planned in September, he highlighted to Motorsport News the significance of the Acropolis to his Cumbria firm.

"It's our most successful ever rally with eight victories between 1997 and 2009," Wilson said. "But the one that stands out the most is 2000 when Colin [McRae] and Carlos [Sainz] finished first and second with the Ford Focus RS WRC. That was the first car to be designed and developed here at M-Sport, and a very special moment for everyone involved – and I still have the picture hanging in my office!"

The Acropolis takes Chile's September 9-12 date and its return to WRC for the first time since 2013 ensures the 12-round schedule is maintained.

"We were all disappointed to hear that Rally Chile had been forced to cancel," Wilson said. "They put on a fantastic rally in 2019, but we also understand how difficult the situation with Covid-19 has been. I hope we'll be rallying in Chile again soon, but I also have to say that we have a fantastic replacement with the Acropolis.

"It's hard to believe that eight years have passed since this event was last part of the championship. It's a true test of man and machine and has produced some thrilling events over the years – as well as always being a great event for us as a team."

The Acropolis returned to the European championship roster after it lost its WRC berth for 2014 when Craig Breen and Scott Martin took a debut win for Peugeot's 208 T16. But the event hasn't been held since it dropped off the ERC calendar after the 2018 running. The event was first held in 1951.

But what was once the roughest and toughest event on the World championship list is back for its 39th WRC appearance after WRC Promoter secured a "multi-year agreement" with the Greek government.

Although the traditional start under the Parthenon temple in Athens has been confirmed, it's not clear what route will be followed and whether previous homes Lamia or Loutraki are in contention to host the rally.

Greensmith will have new co-driver for the rest of '21

SUPPORT FOR EDMONDSON AFTER SPLIT FROM M-SPORT'S GREENSMITH

Chris Patterson has labelled Elliott Edmondson a "great talent" after replacing him as Gus Greensmith's co-driver for the remainder of the 2021 WRC season.

Patterson, who has 12 World championship podiums from 136 starts, will make his first top-flight appearance since Rally Spain in October 2018 when he partners Greensmith on the Croatia Rally from April 22-25 in an M-Sport Ford Fiesta WRC.

Greensmith, 24, joined forces with Edmondson, 26, for the first time in 2015. They rekindled the partnership for 2019, but an indifferent start to his first full season in a World Rally Car in 2021 has prompted Greensmith to call on the vastly experienced Patterson instead.

"Elliott has done nothing wrong, he's a very capable co-driver," Greensmith told Motorsport News. "But there's nothing he can do about the level of experience he's got. Chris has that experience and the only way I can make the improvements I need to make would be to have somebody like Chris in the car.

"Getting him to come out of retirement means he strongly believes we're going to get somewhere. I just need to put the last pieces of the puzzle in place to put together the complete performances."

Patterson: Citroen in '18

Northern Irishman Patterson, 52, said: "Elliott has done a really, really good job, he's a great talent with a big future. But we have some goals and we're going to try to eat into that one second per kilometre."

BREEN TO REACCLIMATISE TO TARMAC WITH CROATIA OUTING

Craig Breen's long wait to drive a World Rally Car on Tarmac in the WRC is at an end after the Irishman was selected as part of Hyundai's three-strong line-up on the Croatia Rally.

Not since Rally Spain in 2018 has Breen driven a top-level car on a sealed-surface round of the WRC, although the 31-year-old did contest the Belgian championship Rally Oudenaarde last September in an i20 Coupe WRC.

Breen, who will be co-driven by countryman Paul Nagle, said: "Those that know me know just how much I love the buzz of driving a WRC car on Tarmac. I really can't wait."

Thierry Neuville and Arctic Rally Finland winner Ott Tanak complete the Hyundai attack on the Zagreb event following appearances on Rallye Sanremo in Italy from April 8-11.

Breen has not rallied on Tarmac since Rally Spain in 2018

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RALLY NEWS

COVID SPIKE PUTS PAID TO CROATIA RALLY PLANS

Croatia Rally organisers have canned the planned superspecial stages in Zagreb following a surge of Covid-19 cases in the country.

The capital's showground had been due to host two fan-friendly stages with part of the route running through a giant exhibition hall.

Event chief Daniel Saskin explained: "The [pandemic] situation did not go our way. These tests would gather a larger number of people in a small space so it would be impossible to maintain a required social distance. We decided to shorten the itinerary."

The remainder of the route, which was expected by FIA and WRC officials last month, is currently unchanged with organisers still planning to allow spectator access.

Croatia's WRC debut is scheduled from April 22-25.

AZORES RALLY TO CLOSE WITH STAGE OF SURVIVAL

One of the most iconic stages in international rallying will play a potentially decisive role in the opening round of this year's European Rally Championship.

Sete Cidades, which for a long section runs along the rim of a volcanic crater lake, will be used as the closing stage of next month's Azores Rally.

It follows a major overhaul of the route by event organisers, which has resulted in the stages on the east of the island of Sao Miguel now running on day one and the stages to the west now taking place on day two.

Local driver Rafael Botelho said: "It's a big, big change. Day one about survival with demanding stages in the forests. Day two is now the shorter day and it will be a pleasure to finish with Sete Cidades."

Sete Cidades, often known as the Volcano Stage, is 15 miles long and runs mainly on gravel.

HYUNDAI WRC PRIZE DRIVE FOR JUNIOR BRC CHAMPION

British class title winner to be offered the chance of WRC2 outing in the top flight

Photos: Hyundai Motorsport, M-Sport

The Junior BRC winner will get i20 R5 chance

By Luke Barry

The winner of the 2021 Junior British Rally Championship will be offered the opportunity to drive a Hyundai i20 N Rally2 on a European round of the 2022 World Rally Championship.

This year's JBRC – open to drivers under 26 years old – reverts to an open Rally4/R2 format for 2021 after becoming a one-make series for Ford Fiestas in 2020. The Hyundai prize, offered through its customer racing division, replaces the €60,000 subsidised prize fund for Junior WRC from M-Sport and Pirelli.

It cements a growing relationship between Hyundai and the BRC, with 2019 JBRC champion Josh McErlean contesting that year's Wales Rally GB in an i20 R5 as a reward. He has since become a Hyundai Junior driver for 2021.

"We are always very eager to ensure young and talented drivers in the British championship are recognised and have a platform to be able to showcase their skills and have an opportunity to receive career-defining opportunities," said BRC championship manager Iain Campbell.

"Thanks to the backing of the championship, Hyundai Motorsport and our supporters, we can offer yet another fantastic prize for our Junior winners."

Hyundai Motorsport customer racing operations leader Andrew Johns added: "Continuing our cooperation with the British Rally Championship for 2021 is very exciting. In the past few seasons we've been able to welcome some very talented drivers into an i20 R5, including Josh McErlean who is now part of our Customer Racing Junior Driver programme this year.

"Joining a WRC event with the i20 N Rally2 is a great opportunity for the successful driver to show their pace against the best drivers in the World, and act as a first step in the next stage of their rallying career.

"The series' organisers have done a great job putting together a calendar of events under difficult conditions, and I look forward to following a very competitive season."

BREXIT ISSUES COULD COMPLICATE IRISH HOPES FOR BRC ENTRIES

Extra paperwork needed to move cars between Northern Ireland and the UK mainland due to Brexit is deterring some from committing to the British Rally Championship.

Motorsport UK updated its 'Brexit Transition' guidelines when the UK left the European Union last December, however Jonny Greer believes further clarification is needed on many of the points.

"No-one seems to be able to say with any certainty what we, as competitors, would – or would not – have to do to get a rally car across," Greer told Motorsport News. "The potential worst-case scenario would be having to fill in a Carnet form every time we go to the UK mainland with a rally car.

"If that is the case, we would have to list all of the goods we are taking out of Northern Ireland, as well as the value of the goods and potentially list the country of origin. The cost is around £300-£400 per Carnet but the paperwork is the real issue as far as I'm concerned. Some more clarification would be good before I'd even consider doing the British Rally Championship."

With no Irish Tarmac Championship in 2021, BRC organisers hoped many of that series' big hitters would migrate across to the mainland, although Alastair Fisher and Sam Moffett have both ruled out such an idea to MN.

Moffett's younger brother, Josh, does intend to register for the series however in a Hyundai i20 R5 and looks set to be joined by Desi Henry. "The Oulton Park news is interesting," said Henry. "I had intended on going to the Nicky Grist Stages with the Hyundai, which is ready to go. I'm really looking forward to going rallying again, so hopefully things keep moving in the right direction with Covid."

Desi Henry may still head to the British Rally Championship

McCourt's full roster of ERC events is still up in the air

McCOURT PLOTS FOUR-ROUND EUROPEAN RALLYING CAMPAIGN IN 2021

Cathan McCourt will start at least four rounds of the European Rally Championship this season, beginning with next month's Azores Rally.

Competing in a Ford Fiesta Rally2 alongside Brian Hoy, McCourt had intended on entering events ad hoc, with Rallye Le Touquet in France one of those. However, its postponement of due to strict coronavirus restrictions across the country led to a rethink.

"We are going to do the first four [ERC] rounds to see how we get on and take it from there," 2019 Irish Forestry champion McCourt told MN. "We wanted to be active in the sport again and we are really looking forward to getting started now.

"Myself and Brian just want to learn and progress on every rally – that's the main objective," he added. "The experience of doing ERC events and the knowledge you gain being out there is just unbelievable."

McCourt is no stranger to the ERC having started Rally Liepaja in Latvia and Rally Islas Canarias during the second half of last season. He was on course to record respectable results on both events only for mechanical and turbo woes to intervene and cut short his involvement.

However, those setbacks – and the opportunity to recce the stages – are experiences McCourt says will help him ahead of his newest campaign.

"I learned a lot from making my own pacenotes for each event," he said, "not to mention reading into and understanding all the different rules and regulations. Based on all of those experiences, I know more about what to expect going into this year."

Photos: Jakob Ebrey, Paul Lawrence

Forestry stages: not be allowed until September

ENGLISH FORESTRY EVENTS NOT ABLE TO RUN UNTIL SEPTEMBER

New guidance says that Forestry England events are off-limits until late 2021

By Luke Barry

Motorsport UK has been advised that stage rallies on Forestry England land will not be permitted until September 30, despite rallying being allowed to recommence in the estate earlier this year.

Last September, Forestry England launched an independent review into the use of its forests for motorsport with its findings published February. Some 1700 responses were collated, and Forestry England agreed to allow its forests to be open for stage rallies once again after a temporary suspension throughout the review process.

However, MN understands an access agreement is yet to be agreed between Forestry England and Motorsport UK, and now permits for events are being withheld until September 30. In a statement last Friday, Motorsport UK said it "understands that Forestry England's estate has proven more popular than ever as restrictions ease and anticipate that this demand from the public will increase more over the summer staycation months.

"The governing body continues to liaise with Forestry England in regard to the longer term access arrangements that were announced in February."

This news is a blew to organisers of the Kielder Forest Rally who had hoped to host the first UK multi-venue rally in 15 months on June 19. The event was supposed to kickstart the 2021 BTRDA Rally Series but that will no longer be possible.

The British Rally Championship calendar has been affected too with Trackrod Rally Yorkshire's planned date of September 24-25 falling just a single week too early to comply with the new restrictions.

There had been no update from either championship or any of the affected events when MN went to press.

RALLY3 FIESTA TO SHOW TARMAC PACE ON SANREMO

M-Sport's Polish operation has entered its Ford Fiesta Rally3 on next week's Rally Sanremo to demonstrate its performance on Tarmac.

That's according to company head Maciej Woda following the car's World debut on the snow and ice of the O.K. Auto-Ralli in Finland last month.

"People are questioning how fast the car will be on Tarmac so we are planning to appear in Sanremo with our Junior WRC champion with Tom Kristensson," Woda said on last week's ERC The Stage online talk show.

"The first car has been delivered to customers and we're on a big push to deliver more."

British champ is eager to run

EDWARDS: OULTON PARK WILL BE A REAL CHALLENGE

Reigning British Rally champion Matt Edwards has told MN the new opening round of the series, the Neil Howard Stages at Oulton Park, will be a challenge.

The event, which will also be the third round of the Motorsport News Circuit Rally Championship, kicks off the BRC season on May 31 and marks the first time the championship has hosted a round at a race circuit.

While MN understands some competitors hold reservations about the validity of the rally as a BRC round, Volkswagen Polo GTI R5 driver Edwards – who did the rally in 2019 – is happy to have the season start moved forward and thanked the BRC organisers for offering up the rally to the competitors rather than just telling them it was being added.

"Obviously I'd love a three-day rally on the Isle of Man to be the first round, but I think everybody's got to adjust," Edwards said. "I just want to get back in a rally car again. But Oulton Park, the organisers do a good job there, I enjoyed it when I did it and it was a challenge.

"One of the stages has got gravel, it's got really smooth Tar and it's got that slippy bit in it so it is a challenge in many different ways."

MNCRC regular Mark Kelly, who was second on December's Dukeries Rally in his Ford Fiesta R5, is relishing the prospect of measuring himself against the BRC contingent.

"It's brilliant, you couldn't want a better benchmark could you?" he told MN. "I think everyone's always wondering how they would fare against the British championship boys, so I think it's brilliant for everybody."

Tomlin plots a busy year

HISTORIC DRIVER TOMLIN TO WELSH CHAMPIONSHIP IN FIESTA R5

David Tomlin will step up to a Ford Fiesta R5 this season to contest the Welsh Rally Championship and select rounds of the British Rally Championship, including the Nicky Grist and the Cambrian.

Former kart racer Tomlin is best known in historic racing but has rallied a Ford Escort Mk2 in historic events over last couple of years. He plans to continue racing and doing some rallies in the Escort as well competing in the R5 car.

"I'm just an amateur," said the Worcestershire businessman. "But it will be good to see how close we can get to the top guys. It doesn't look like there will be much rallying until June or July. We've given the car a run and I felt at home in it. If you point it in the right direction it seems to go in that direction."

The car, registered RIG 1213, has been with Dom Buckley RSC and has done fewer than 30 rallies in four seasons, notably in the hands of Alastair Fisher in Ireland and several drivers in the Scottish Rally Championship.

Tomlin plans to end his season with another entry on the Roger Albert Clark Rally with his Escort Mk2.

MAJOR RESHUFFLE FOR WORLD RX SCHEDULE

The World Rallycross championship has been cut from 10 rounds to eight for the 2021 season with a new schedule announced by series' new leadership, WRC Promoter.

The eight rounds will be run solely in Europe over seven weekends. A series statement said: "It [the calendar] has been condensed and territorially contained to comply with health protocols and travel restrictions."

The opening round has been moved from May to June, and will be held at Hell, Norway instead of Spa-Francorchamps, which has moved to take the place of the series finale in October. Latvia returns to the schedule, but Kouvola in Finland has been dropped.

Barcelona's Formula 1 circuit will host a Friday evening-Saturday evening event in July, before a double-header weekend for World RX a week later at the Nurburgring in Germany.

This year will be the final season for internal combustion engine cars at the top level of World RX with the RX1 (Supercar) class set to switch to electric technology from next year.

"The calendar has been revised with the support of the World RX teams to ensure a fitting finale for the Supercars ahead of the start of the exciting electric era in 2022," said WRC Promoter managing director Jona Siebel.

CALENDAR

World Rallycross championship, 2021

ROUND	DATE	VENUE
Round 1	June 12-13	Hell, Norway
Round 2	July 2-4	Holjes, Sweden
Round 3	July 23-24	Barcelona, Spain
Round 4	July 31-Aug 1	Nurburgring, Germany**
Round 5	Sep 3-5	Loheac, France
Round 6	Sep 18-19	Riga, Latvia*
Round 7	Oct 9-10	Spa, Belgium

* = subject to promoter agreement
** = double header

The World RX battle will recommence at Hell in Norway in the middle of June

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HISTORICS

DOWN THE PUB

JOHN BRADSHAW

Racer and engineer
Age: 67 Lives: Clitheroe

Bradshaw: Chevron man

He raced single-seaters in the 1980s

"I'd been racing quite a bit when I won the Monoposto Championship in 1987. Then I started Road and Race [restorations] in 1988 and had a big lay-off from racing. I started the company in the hope that I was going to make enough money to be able to continue with my racing."

Business forced a long gap from racing

"I'd got a Reynard 863 and it was all set up and ready. But starting a business was tough so the next time I managed to get hold of a racing car was in 2004. In that time we'd had a family as well and our son Tom was born in 1989, the year after we started Road and Race. My wife Jackie and I have a daughter as well and we're now grandparents three times over."

He raced in Classic F3

"I came back into racing with an Argo JM1 which was a lovely car that had spent its life in Italy and had been used and abused. So it was a labour of love. We had some good fun with that car in Classic Formula 3. The first time back was at Donington and I thought I was dead slow and I'd lost it. But I ended up second quickest. And then it sort of went downhill from there!"

His son Tom started racing

"Tom didn't do any karting. We both did radio-controlled cars and loved it. We we're up and down the country and he won the junior championship. But when he was 15 he said he won't mind driving a kart and that, of course, was the end of my racing. I bought a Chevron B39 from the States and rebuilt it and I rebuilt the Reynard 89FF that Tom used for his first year. We also had a Royale RP27 and the idea was initially that Tom was going to race with me, I'd do Classic F3 and he could use the Formula Ford 2000 in the same race."

Now they have a Chevron B19

"From then he carried on and we got into the Formula Ford and I enjoyed running it. I must admit, I get probably as much enjoyment from running the car. I've driven the Chevron B19 we now have a couple of times but I've never raced it. We've put a fabulous season together in Masters Historic Sports with the B19. I just hope it all comes off."

Races will have to wait until July 2022

Photos: Paul Lawrence

Organisers want to wait until the public can attend event

FURTHER DELAY FOR CLASSIC LE MANS AS 2021 EDITION IS CANCELLED

New date set in July 2022 for biennial historic extravaganza at La Sarthe

By Paul Lawrence

The Le Mans Classic, one of the biggest events on the historic motorsport calendar, has been cancelled for 2021 in the face of the ongoing pandemic situation in France.

The 10th biennial event was originally planned for July 2020 but postponed for a year as Covid took hold across Europe. Now, the promoters have confirmed that it has been further postponed until July 2022. As well as running in 2022, plans are in place for the Classic to also run in 2023 to mark the centenary celebrations of the 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Typically, the event that features a series of one-hour races over a 24-hour period attracts dozens of UK competitors in cars of the type that raced at Le Mans from the 1920s to the 1980s Group C era.

A press statement said: "Due to the more than capricious changes in the constraints applied to large-scale events, Peter Auto and the Automobile Club de l'Ouest were forced to postpone once again the 10th edition of Le Mans Classic to the first or second weekend of July 2022."

Patrick Peter of event promoter Peter Auto added: "The maximum figures of people imposed by the government do not allow us to maintain this event on the initial dates. Moreover, even if it has been considered, a closed session would not do justice to this event and would considerably reduce the beautiful tribute to the great history of endurance. Le Mans Classic without public, without exhibitors and without clubs is not Le Mans Classic."

Briggs will tackle Thundersports and race McLaren M29

Mighty McLaren to join the Thundersports line-up

A second Can-Am McLaren will be on the Thundersports grid this season after ex-pat New Zealander Warren Briggs confirmed plans to race a McLaren M8E.

After taking a season out in 2020, UK-based Briggs will split his time between the mighty Can-Am sports-racer and his ex-John Watson McLaren M29 in Masters Historic F1 events.

"I raced the M8 in the States a couple of times but now it's in the UK and I'm aiming for the Thundersports opener at Silverstone in May. I've not tested it in the UK yet but it puts a big smile of you face!"

Briggs ran the grand prix car at the recent Masters test day and will race it at Donington this weekend. In the Can-Am car, he will go up against the M8F of Dean Forward. The Thundersports entry for Silverstone GP on May 22-23 is already past 25 cars.

Joy Rainey honoured at Shelsley Walsh

The late Joy Rainey will be celebrated at the Shelsley Walsh Classic Nostalgia event on July 17-18.

The highly regarded Rainey overcame physical disability to hold the ladies' record at Shelsley for 22 years from 1986.

A Shelsley spokesperson said: "While the pandemic has so far prevented the motorsport community from being able to celebrate Joy's life following her death last year, she will be remembered at Classic Nostalgia via the presentation of a 'Fastest Lady' trophy. The trophy has been gifted to Shelsley Walsh from Joy's personal collection."

Rainey's long-time friend and regular co-driver Mark Riley will demonstrate the Cooper-Norton, formally raced in the 1950s by Joy's father Murray Rainey, the Australian Formula 3 champion.

CULLEN AND SHOVLIN ARE REAL GENTLEMEN

Irish duo Michael Cullen and Paddy Shovlin are the latest drivers to get a Cobra Daytona Coupe and will share the car in Masters Gentleman Drivers races this season. The Cobra was previously owned by Paul Gibson and is now with the Jordan Racing Team alongside the Lotus Cortina that Cullen and Shovlin will share in Pre '66 Touring Cars.

Fortec boss Dutton to race new-build Ford Escort Mk1

Team owner and historic racer Richard Dutton has built a Ford Escort Mk1 for the new Sixties Touring Car Challenge from Motor Racing Legends.

The Fortec boss plans to test the Escort at Silverstone in mid-April and race it at the Donington Historic Festival for the first time. It has been built up from the bare shell.

"It's just a lovely car," Dutton said. "I've not driven it yet, but it should be a lot of fun. It's got a twin-cam engine to suit period engine regs.

"It's just one of those cars of that I've always fancied but I'm not sure how we'll get on with it."

He will continue to race his Lotus Cortina in Masters events as well.

IN BRIEF

Pat Anderson

MN was sad to learn of the death of rally driver Pat Anderson last week at the age of 84. He rallied a wide range of cars over five decades and his son Guy followed him into rallying. Most recently Pat competed on historic stage rallies in a Talbot Sunbeam and was a popular competitor and long-standing member of Middlesex County Automobile Club.

Masters streamed

Although spectators cannot be admitted to the Masters Historic Festival at Donington Park this weekend, the race action from Saturday afternoon will be live-streamed with the help of Race TV. The broadcast will start at lunchtime and is set to take in half a dozen races including Historic F1, Historic F2 and Masters Endurance Legends. The coverage will be available via race.tv

Glover: triple attack

After a season racing in Radicals, Neil Glover will be back in historics this year running three cars in various series. He will race an Arrows A3 in Masters Historic F1, a Lola Formula 5000 in the Aurora Trophy and a Ford Mustang in various Pre '66 Touring Car races. Glover shook down the Arrows at the recent Masters test day at Donington Park.

GT and Tourers plus

Masters Historic Racing has added a new race to its opening event of the season at Donington Park this Friday and Saturday. A 40-minute race for all Pre-1980 GT and Touring Cars will run on Easter Saturday to replace the Pre '66 Mini race originally planned. Instead, the Minis will be absorbed into the hour-long Pre '66 Touring Car race.

Hartley in Formula 3

Historic F1 racer Steve Hartley has added a Formula 3 Ralt RT32 to his stable to run alongside his McLaren MP4/1. He will take the F3 car, also finished in Marlboro colours, to Historic F1 races where there are suitable races and also plans to let his mechanics sample the car when conditions allow. "We're just going to have some fun with it," he said.

Le Mans mini-classic

Although forced to cancel the 2021 Le Mans Classic due to limits on spectator attendance, Peter Auto will still run a race meeting over the same weekend (July 3-4) on the Le Mans Bugatti circuit. The event will feature the usual mix of Peter Auto categories including the Classic Endurance Racing series and Group C.

FEATURE

Photos: Extreme E

Button's JBXE is ready to strike

Jamie Chadwick will race for the Veloce operation

HOW EXTREME E IS READY TO WRITE A NEW SPORTING CHAPTER

Hal Ridge looks ahead to a revolution for electric-powered motorsport which starts this weekend

CALENDAR

Extreme E 2021

DATE	VENUE
April 3-4	Desert X Prix: AlUla, Saudi Arabia
May 29-30	Ocean X Prix: Lac Rose, Senegal
Aug 28-29	Arctic X Prix: Kangerlussuaq, Greenland
Oct 23-24	Amazon X Prix: Para, Brazil
Dec 11-12	Glacier X Prix: Tierra del Fuego, Argentina

The cars will tackle the terrain in Saudi Arabia

Motor racing enters a new dimension this weekend as the Extreme E series gets underway in Saudi Arabi.

More than just a new championship created by Formula E founder Alejandro Agag, Extreme E's philosophy is to use its all-electric concept to not only promote sustainability and electromobility, but to use motorsport to highlight global issues.

Nine single-car teams will take part in the full campaign, with squads owned and headed up by some A-list motorsport names, including Lewis Hamilton, Nico Rosberg, Jenson Button, Chip Ganassi, Zak Brown, ABT and Carlos Sainz.

Each car will be driven for half of each two-lap race respectively by a male and female driver, including a driver change, while the tracks at the five rounds in Saudi Arabia (Desert X Prix), Senegal (Ocean X Prix), Greenland (Arctic X Prix), Brazil (Amazon X Prix) and Argentina (Glacier X Prix) will be laid for a race to last around 15 minutes, and be more cross-country rally-raid than World rally stage in terrain.

The remote locations for each round have been chosen as areas that have suffered as a result of climate change and human activity and the entire paddock, including the race cars, is being transported around the world by a converted Royal Mail ship called the St Helena.

The format for each race weekend will look familiar to rallycross fans, with Qualifying 1 and 2 on Saturday, and the finals on Sunday.

The second day's action will include semi-final 1 (the top four cars from Saturday) and semi-final 2, also called the 'the crazy race', for the remaining five teams. The top three cars from semi 1, and the top two cars from semi 2 move forward to the final. Grid positions for the final will be allocated via a 'Gridplay' online voting system where fans vote for their favourite drivers.

While some teams will run aesthetically different bodywork, the rear-wheel-drive, 1650kg tubular-motor space-frame, 400kW-producing ODYSSEY 21 SUVs by French firm Spark Racing Technologies are otherwise identical. A 'hyperdrive' feature, giving a power boost for a fixed period of time, will be available to each driver on each lap of each race. ■

Sebastien Loeb will be at the wheel of the X44-tended machine

Munnings at Andretti United

TEAMS

5 Veloce Racing

Male driver: Stephane Sarrazin (FRA)
Female driver: Jamie Chadwick (GBR)
One of the most accomplished multi-discipline drivers on the planet, including substantial amounts of rally experience (mostly on Tarmac), Stephane Sarrazin only lacks rally raid-type knowledge in his skill set but he can spring a surprise this year with the Veloce Racing squad. Jamie Chadwick, meanwhile, is even less versed in off-road motorsport, but proved her worth by winning the inaugural W Series in 2019.

6 Rosberg X Racing

Male: Johan Kristoffersson (SWE)
Female: Molly Taylor (AUS)
Johan Kristoffersson has excelled in circuit racing, rallycross and rallying. While the cross-country nature of XE will be new to the triple-World RX champ, form suggests it won't take him long to be right on the pace in Nico Rosberg's squad this year, especially alongside former Australian rally champion Molly Taylor in the 2016 F1 champ's team.

22 JBXE

Male: Jenson Button (GBR)
Female: Mikaela Ahlin-Kottulinsky (SWE)
Jenson Button has succeeded at the highest level, but that was on silky smooth Tarmac circuits. He's expanded his horizons with a handful of off-road appearances since Formula 1 retirement, but it will take time for him to get up to speed against some of off-road racing's biggest stars. Swedish Touring Car Championship race winner Mikaela Ahlin-Kottulinsky does have rallycross history though, and has also helped develop XE's Continental tyres in the ODYSSEY 21.

23 Andretti United Extreme E

Male: Timmy Hansen (SWE)
Female: Catie Munnings (GBR)
Timmy Hansen is one of three World RX title winners on the XE grid for 2021 and, as arguably one of the most underrated drivers in rallycross, can be a dark horse in XE. Catie Munnings comes with rally experience under her belt, and the pair have worked hard together since teaming up for United Andretti to best improve their chances, including driving in the desert in the Middle East, and Swedish frozen lakes.

42 Hispano Suiza Xite Energy Team

Male: Oliver Bennett (GBR)
Female: Christine Giompaoli (ESP)
Going one step further than the Andretti United pair, British World RX driver Oliver Bennett has spent much of 2021 so-far in the Middle East, practising driving in the dunes ahead of the XE opener, including competing in the Dubai International Baja. Christine Giampaoli meanwhile, an experienced rally and off-road driver, has spent time testing recently with Swedish rallycross team Olsbergs MSE in frozen Sweden to help her prepare for the XE challenge.

44 X44

Male: Sebastien Loeb (FRA)
Female: Cristina Gutierrez (ESP)
Two of the biggest names in motorsport combine at X44. The squad is owned by seven-time F1 title-winner Lewis Hamilton and nine-time WRC title-winner Sebastien Loeb brings a wealth of off-road knowledge. Cristina Gutierrez is also a veteran of four Dakar Rallies finishes, and her stage-winning performances in the 2021 event put this team immediately in XE contention.

55 Acciona – Sainz XE Team

Male: Carlos Sainz (ESP)
Female: Laia Sanz (ESP)
Acciona entered an all-electric car in the 2017 Dakar rally. Four years on from that pioneering effort, the squad has joined forces with Spanish electromobility specialist QEV, and double WRC champion and three-time Dakar winner Carlos Sainz, for its XE assault. 'El Matador' Sainz is among the most decorated off-road drivers in the field, while Laia Sanz's experience mostly comes from two-wheeled cross-country efforts, but she and has also tried her hand at circuit racing and rallycross too.

99 Segi TV Chip Ganassi Racing

Male: Kyle LeDuc (USA)
Female: Sara Price (USA)
Arguably the dark horses of the XE line-up ahead of the season-opener. The Ganassi squad brings over three decades' experience of circuit racing, and more recently rallycross knowledge, to its XE programme, while all-American pairing of Kyle LeDuc and Sara Price has multiple off-road titles in the USA and Super Truck experience respectively in their locker.

125 ABT Cupra XE

Male: Mattias Ekstrom (SWE)
Female: Claudia Hurtgen (DEU)
Since officially retiring from World RX as a permanent driver, DTM champion Mattias Ekstrom has contested another full season of the same series, undertaken a Dakar assault, competed in national Swedish rallies and more recently the Arctic WRC round. The 2016 World RX champ joins Kristoffersson and Loeb in the multi-discipline experience stakes and together with experienced circuit racer Claudia Hurtgen can shine for the Cupra-backed ABT squad.

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FEATURE

BEN EDWARDS:

IT WAS A PRIVILEGE TO COMMENTATE ON GRAND PRIX RACING

Matt James puts the readers' questions to the man at the microphone

Had things happened slightly differently for Ben Edwards in the formative stages of his motorsport journey, he could have been the subject of a grand prix commentator's words, rather than being the man speaking them himself.

Edwards was an up-and-coming single-seater racer in the late 1980s, with his eyes firmly set on the upper echelons of motor racing. However, like so many, the funding ran dry at a crucial time. So, instead of putting his foot down, he picked up a microphone. In an obvious parallel to any young hopeful driver's career, he made the hard yards at the beginning of his broadcasting career to eventually make it to terrestrial TV talking about the sport he loves.

But the racing bug has never truly left Edwards, who is widely regarded as one of the nicest men in the paddock. He has bought a Formula Ford 1600 car and still tackles the occasional race, and has plans to be on the grid for the 50th Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch later this season.

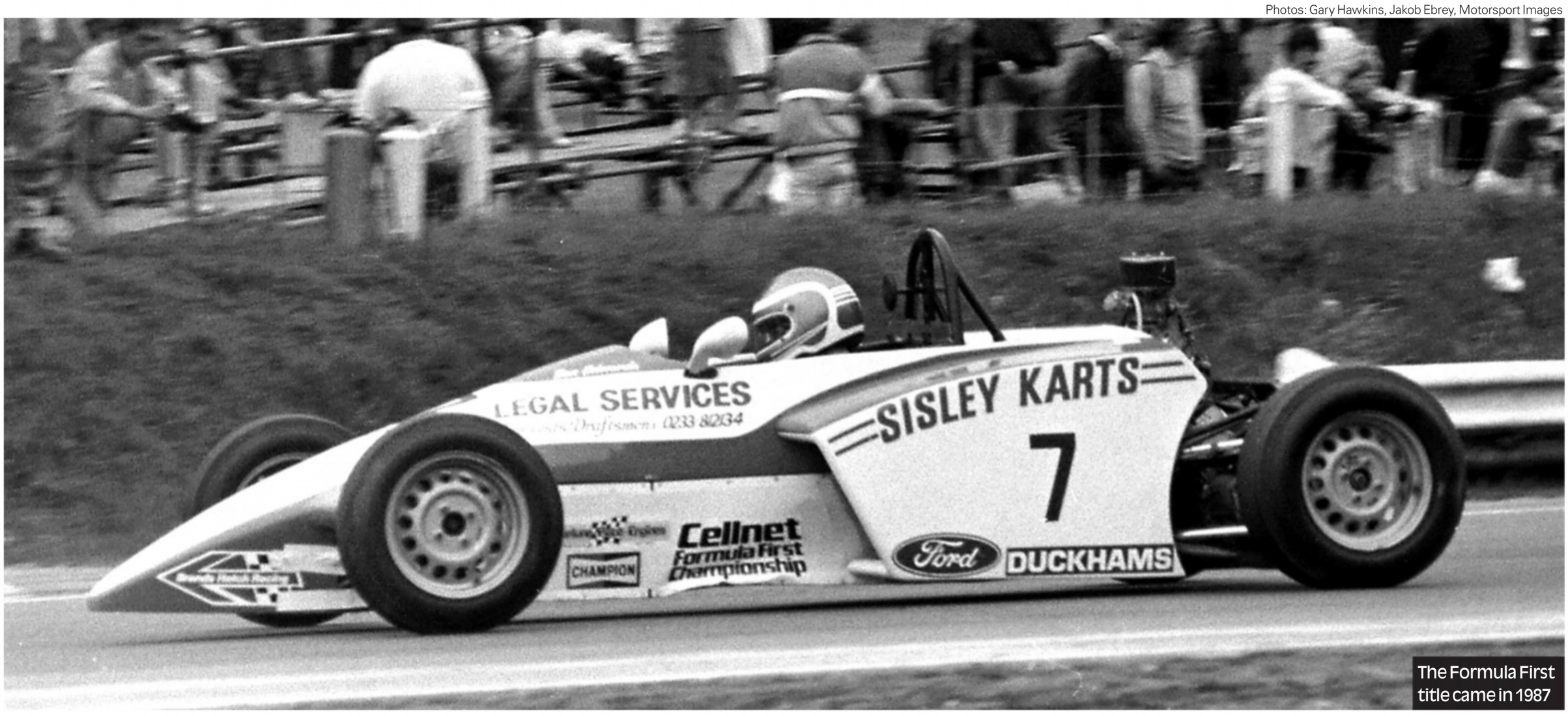
Here, he tells Motorsport News about his plans, and why he has now decided to step away from the microphone.

Question: What and who got you into motorsport?
Ben Roebuck
Via Twitter
Ben Edwards: "It wasn't in my family, but there were some bits of a connection, I suppose. My brother was always into cars – not motorsport necessarily – but he did buy a grasstrack car, a Ford Anglia. We lived on a little small holding farm, and he would charge around the fields and I used to ride around in it. He is seven years older than me so I would just hang on as a passenger, but I thought it was enormous fun.

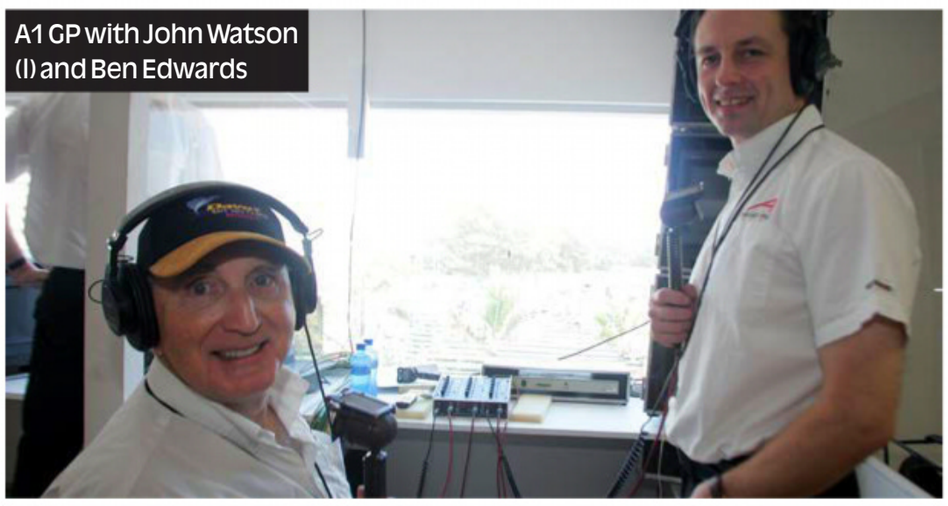
"That was an introduction, and I have always loved cars, from an early stage in my life. The motor racing really came from a mixture of things. My dad had a classic car, a Railton, which we took to an event at Brands Hatch. I went along with my brother and I was very attracted by the things that were happening there and the racing school was on so we both bought passenger rides in the Sports 2000 cars. I can't remember who drove me around, but it was mind-blowing for me.

"Then, another chance thing was that a friend of my aunt, her son was running Formula Ford 1600 cars. We were put in touch and that was how I met Rob Creswell. I volunteered to be a gofer for the team when I was 15, polishing bodywork and things like that, and that is what really got me into the sport."
MN: That must have been great fun...
BE: "The team was called Rob Creswell Racing Services. I started in 1982 as a gofer and Andy Ackerley won the Champion of Brands title that year with Rob's team. Then Karl Jones won it with Rob the following year and Chris Ringrose made it a hat-trick in 1984. I was a full mechanic by then, and a few years later Chris returned the compliment by helping me with my Formula First, and he still helps now with my Formula Ford."
MN: So was moving onto the spanners, was that something you just learned along the way?
BE: "By working with Rob Creswell, yes. It was something I was interested in from a youngster. I always like fiddling with cars. I actually got my first car at the

Photos: Gary Hawkins, Jakob Ebrey, Motorsport Images



The Formula First title came in 1987



A1 GP with John Watson (l) and Ben Edwards

"Winning FFirst fired my driving ambitions"

Ben Edwards

Hit with the fans: TV man at the British GP

farm when I was only 13. I had a Mini Traveller and that was when I was able to start doing bits and pieces on it. That was part of my passion growing, but it was Rob who showed me what to do with a racing car. I was on the spanners while I was doing A-levels and I then got a place at university to do Mechanical Engineering – funnily enough, I was on the same course as [future Simtek F1 boss] Nick Wirth and one of [March co-founder] Robin Herd's sons – but I didn't last at it.

"By then I had already had a year out between school and uni and I had worked full-time for Rob with the team. I had thoroughly enjoyed myself but when I went to uni I hated it. I left pretty early on and managed to scrape enough money together to get my first race car, which was a pre-'74 Formula Ford car."

MN: Had you always wanted to be in the cockpit yourself?

BE: "I had always wanted to compete and when I worked for Rob for a long time initially I didn't work for money, I worked for the opportunity to do a test in a Formula Ford. In 1985 I did five or six races and then a similar number in 1986."

MN sets the scene: After whetting the appetite in pre-74 Formula Ford, Edwards was one of the trailblazers in Brands Hatch boss John Webb's new Formula First initiative, a low-cost single-seater with a transversely mounted engine from a Ford Fiesta XR2. It was introduced in 1987.

Question: What were the Formula First cars like to drive?
Auto Tradition
Via Twitter

BE: "I was looking to do the Dunlop Star of Tomorrow Formula Ford 1600 championship in 1987. So I sold my pre-'74 car and then jointly bought a new chassis with a guy I had met through working at the racing school at Brands Hatch. He was a bit of a novice but he wanted to do some racing as well, so we bought a Reynard 84FF. But then, as the end of the 1986 season came around and the Formula First thing came up, Chris Creswell [Rob's bother] encouraged me toward Formula First. He said I should look at it, but I couldn't afford the car, even though it was *only* about £7000 at the time. Chris actually did a deal with me. He said he would buy the car and in return, if I won the championship, I had to pay him the prize money and it would, of course, be his car to sell on at the end of the year. I was bowled over by that – it was a really kind thing to do.

"I put my order in reasonably early for a FFirst car once I had sold the Reynard. I had some backing from Bill Sisley and from Legal Services which was one of Rick Shortle's backers. There was help from John Webb and Andy Ackerley. Plus a wonderful chap I met when instructing, a chartered surveyor called Martin Dutt who just loved having an involvement."

MN: The cars did look like they had some wayward handling…

BE: I enjoyed it but they weren't easy. They were tail happy because of the way the engine was mounted. They could be a bit wallowy. When the back started to go it went quite quickly. But it had a good turn-in, which I enjoyed, and I was quite happy with oversteer on the car. It did actually suit me quite well and what I found, when I went on to Formula Vauxhall Lotus was that a car with slicks and wings was a very different thing. I think I had developed my driving style in Formula First, but when I went into Vauxhall Lotus, my style didn't work at all and it took a while for me to get my head around that. Formula First was good, and it was a great year in 1987 because I won the title."

MN: That was a great achievement because, although you wouldn't have known it at the time, it was a heck of a crop of drivers in that first year of FFirst…

BE: "There were guys like Eugene O'Brien, Raphael del Sarte, Kelvin Burt, Chris Goodwin – there were some good drivers in there. It was tough, and Eugene was particularly hard to race with. He was my biggest rival and we had a very hard level of competition and it got a bit rough at times. But I did come out on top and it was a big deal.

"Winning that title certainly did give me big aspirations then. When I got into racing initially, it was because I loved racing and I was enjoying myself but there was no thought to become a professional driver. But once I had won a title, your hopes become raised."

MN: You then went on to Formula Vauxhall and the Formula Opel Euroseries, but you didn't have the deepest pockets to do that, either…

BE: "Again, I was very lucky and I did manage to raise a sponsor from my home village. A guy had seen some press cuttings of me winning in Formula First and he had seen me working on my race car and got involved. He ran a property development company called Blue Lamp and he backed me, putting a distinctive colour scheme on the car, so I had a reasonable budget which enabled me to step up.

"Going to Vauxhall Lotus was a big jump. John Webb wanted me to do Formula Ford 2000. Vauxhall Lotus was new at the time [1988] and it was quite a big step and I did the Opel Euroseries too. I started with the Racefax team and then switched to Swindon Motorsport in the second part of the year and then in 1989 I ran with Dragon Motorsport. They were running Mika Hakkinen in British Formula 3 that year and I was doing Vauxhall Lotus. In 1990, I did a few races running the car myself with a mechanic but by then, I had run out of money and it just didn't come together for a bunch of reasons. So 1991 was a quiet year and then my last full year of racing was in 1992 when I won the Caterham Vauxhall championship."

Question: What was your best race win? Was it in Caterham Vauxhall or Formula First? Did you ever manage Eau Rouge flat in the Caterham?
David Walton
Facebook

BE: "It is funny you ask that question because one of the most important victories to me was when I managed to win at Spa in 1993 in a Caterham. That was a huge weekend for me, but I don't think I was flat through Eau Rouge…but I was in the Vauxhall Lotus though, I remember that!

"I was only doing that round in 1993 as a one-off. It was a big deal, especially as when I had done the Opel Euroseries at Spa a few years before, the first part of qualifying had been wet and I was on the second row. Second qualifying was dry and I was absolutely nowhere and didn't have a great race. So, to go back and to do it in a Caterham and win at such an amazing place. That was one of my best, I think."

Question: How did you get to be a motorsport commentator?
Dyfan Evans
Via Facebook

BE: "The first time I commentated was in 1987. I had won the Formula First championship and the rules meant that you were then prevented from taking part in the Winter Series too. I knew the BBC were going to be covering those winter races, and so I wrote to them and said that I was the champion but I would be on the sidelines and would they like me to provide some expert insight? I ended up commentating with Tiff Needell – it felt a bit ironic that I was the expert in that scenario!

"That got me into it a bit, but I had also helped [resident Brands Hatch track commentator] Brian Jones. He was the one who really encouraged me to, rather than be the expert, go down the actual commentary route. He was very supportive, and at some Brands Hatch Grand Prix track meetings, he put me out in the box at Westfield. It all started from that. That was in the late 1980s.

"My first television opportunity was with Eurosport in 1991. Steve Slater [who worked for Eurosport] had been at Brands Hatch and had done some commentary work with Brian and I had been having a chat with Steve about how to get into the TV world. Steve gave me a

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FEATURE

contact. He had been doing quite a lot of stuff for Eurosport but they had moved their base to Paris and they would fly the commentators out there to do the work. Steve didn't want to do that and he put me in touch with them. It took a while to get it going but it eventually started happening."

MN: So what was your first gig for Eurosport?

BE: "The first thing I did for them was the World Sportscar Championship from the Nurburgring, although I did it from Paris. I did bits and pieces for them over the next couple of years and then, when they started doing Indycar coverage, it wasn't quite working in my view. They were using the American commentary a bit but then they had to fill in some gaps [during the US advertising breaks]. I pushed to get more involved in that.

"That got my foot in the door really, doing the Indycar stuff. One of the keys was a race in 1994 for Indycar in Australia. There was a huge delay because the weather was closing in and the race didn't get going for ages and I had to waffle on to fill the gap, but apparently John Watson [fellow Eurosport commentator and ex-F1 driver] thought I had done quite a good job. At the end of that year, Allard Kalff had been doing the Formula 1 commentary with Wattie up to that point, but I got a call from the boss at Eurosport saying they were going to change things around a bit. Allard was off to do Dutch TV and they wanted me to step up to Formula 1."

MN: So you made it to Formula 1 eight years after winning your first motor racing championship….

BE: "Yes, I suppose, but it was not quite in the way I had planned it!"

MN: Eurosport must have been a great place to learn your craft.

BE: "It was a brilliant place to learn because you were just thrown in at the deep end. You just had to get on with it. I commentated on everything motor racing-wise: two wheels, three wheels, four wheels and even ice skating."

MN: Pardon?

BE: "It happened once, because if you were there on site at Eurosport and somebody couldn't make it or didn't show up, you just got thrown in. It was figure skating, and I had no idea about the words or terminology…that was a challenge.

"I did the RAC Rally for them, I did rallycross, all sorts. All types of motorsport. It was a brilliant way to learn."

Question: If you were to be a grand prix driver now, which race would you like to win the most? Would it be for the track alone or what surrounds the event, such as the history of that race, weekend as a whole or even the country it's in?
Francis
Via Twitter

BE: "That is a very good question and I think it is very hard to narrow it down into just one. As I have mentioned, Spa has always meant a lot to me so I think winning a Formula 1 race in Belgium would be pretty awesome. It varies, because each event in Formula 1 has something special about it, I have to say."

MN: Not Monaco?

BE: "Monaco is a fabulous place and has all the history, but I have never really raced on street circuits so I would probably be pretty useless!"

Question: Who was your favourite co-commentator you worked with? Who would you like to have worked alongside but never did?
Emma Strawford
Via Twitter

BE: "I have worked with some really good co-commentators across the years. Everyone is slightly different and they are all fun. I have done a lot with John Watson over the years. I did F1 with him, then FIA GT, A1GP together. That has always been a really good relationship with Wattie and I really thank him. When I got into F1, he introduced me to so many people in the paddock – which you might think, 'well of course he would' but actually in the world of F1, people quite often don't do that. He was very welcoming and wanted me to connect with people and wanted me to become a part of that paddock to get a real understanding of it. So I think Wattie would be my most significant co-commentator really because it was when I started out and when I started doing the big time.

"I have had some other great ones. Working with Jeremy Shaw on Indycar was fabulous too. He was very different, he wasn't an ex-racer, but the fact that he could keep a lap chart while he was commentating, I was always amazed by that. He was always very knowledgeable and up to speed with everything, I loved working with him.

"And, also, working with David Coulthard over the past decade has been a real pleasure too."

MN: And is there anybody you haven't worked with who you would like to?

BE: "When I was working with Wattie, I have briefly worked with Martin Brundle. He was in the booth a couple of times in 1995: he was still competing, but he was sharing the Ligier drive [with Aguri Suzuki]. That was when he first started commentating, but we never actually ended up commentating together. I would have enjoyed working with Martin, I think it would have gone well, but it never actually happened."

MN sets the scene: Edwards was a mainstay of the ITV coverage of the British Touring Car Championship from 2002 until 2010, combining the tin-top series with other work in Formula 1 and elsewhere.

Question: The British Touring Car Championship commentators over the 22 years that I was involved were without doubt a fantastic collection of superb contributors. What do you think gave Charlie Cox the edge on the rest of you?
Ian Harrison [former Triple Eight Racing boss and fan of all things Australian, including Charlie Cox, clearly]
Via Facebook

MN: You don't have to answer, this one is tongue in cheek, Ben!

BE: "Ha ha! Charlie had that Australian ability to come up with phrases and terms which I really admire. It is something I can never do. It is a bit like working with Mark Webber, which is always fun. Mark comes up with some fantastic phrases, terms and sentences that, as a British guy, I just wouldn't be able to come up with that sort of thing. I really enjoy that entertaining style of commentary, but it is just not part of me. I do what I do in the best way I can, but I do appreciate their ability to use phrases.

"I am always a little bit anxious about trying to be funny because I think quite often you can make certain people laugh, but you can also wind other people up so I am always a bit cautious."

Question: If you could relive and commentate any race again which one would it be and why?
Barry Denby
Via Twitter

BE: "Oh, gosh, that is quite difficult."

MN: Let's put this another way: has there been a race where you think you've done the perfect commentary?

BE: "I am always very self-critical. I always come away thinking that maybe I could have done a bit better. There have been a few races where I have come away feeling very fulfilled by what's happened on-track.

"The odd thing about commentating is actually that sometimes, if it is a dull race and you can fill the gaps smoothly or without people wondering 'what is he talking about?' then that, in many ways, is the bigger challenge. When it is a really good race, then it is much easier to commentate because all you are doing it just reporting on what you see. When nothing much is happening but you want to keep the audience interested, involved and entertained, that is harder.

"So that means that the race I have found most satisfying, and I can't think of one now, wouldn't have been a key race in terms of excitement but it would have been a race afterwards where I felt I gave it my all and hopefully I was able to keep the viewer engaged.

"There are some key races that do stick in my head. One example is the British Touring Car Championship finale in 2009 when Colin Turkington won his first title. That was a fantastic battle with Jason Plato, Fabrizio Giovanardi and everyone."

MN: A championship showdown like that must be very stressful for you, with all the permutations and things that can happen at any given moment. It must all be down to homework…

BE: "You have to do the homework. It can take a while, but you have to work out what any given scenario means for the bigger picture. It can be very complicated, but you have to put the groundwork in. You need to have a plan. That 2009 year was a really fun BTCC season and it was one of the first times that we could patch through to the driver in the cockpit on the slowing-down lap with radio commentary. That was really special, because he had only just realised himself that he had won it.

"There were some pretty special races from the USA too. There is one that they love playing out which is a CART finish between Juan Pablo Montoya and Michael Andretti at Michigan in 2000 where my voice goes squeaky at the end because they cross the line virtually together. And when Mark Blundell won that race in Portland in 1997, that was another key one and it came a week or two after he had just missed out on winning a race because he ran out of fuel."

Question: If you could change one thing about current F1 what would it be? (Actually, you can change more than one thing if you want!)
David Harbey
Via Twitter

BE: "I would certainly like to see how the idea of the sprint races are going to work. I am not 100% sure about them, like I think the F1 bosses aren't either.

"What would I change? I think the one thing that I am a little concerned about is just how many races they are trying to put on the calendar. I know that for a fan it is lovely to have as many as possible, but I do think that going to 23 or maybe more is just a little too many.

"When you go from the BTCC, which is 10 events and never seems like quite enough, and then you go to F1 which is 20-plus and it seems to many. When I started doing F1 it was about 16 races, which seems right to me. That means it is busy, but there is still time to reflect and then build up to each event. With all the back-to-back races now, it seems they all roll into one another. You tend to lose the sense of occasion a little bit."

Which has been the favourite category you've commentated on and why?
CMC Media
Via Twitter

BE: "I have done so many. But Formula 1 is the top of the motorsport ladder and I am proud to have got there. I am happy about the fact that I did it for a long period of time and I saw some great races: the championship decided in 2012 was one of the best ones for me.

"I used to love commentating on the Andros Trophy Ice Racing series, which I did for Eurosport. It was just so different and I had never seen anything like that. I would come across all sorts of weird and

Indycar in 1994 was a breakthrough for Edwards's TV career ambitions

Edwards spoke to Turkington just after his 2009 BTCC victory

"I always wanted to work with Martin Brundle"

Ben Edwards

Ben on the camera for the BBC

Mark Blundell's 1997 CART win at Portland was memorable

wonderful things on Eurosport. I did all sorts of off-road things, all sorts.

"Although I am not a motorbike man, I did commentate on World championship Speedway for a while, and that was excellent. I loved the instantaneousness of it. The fact that you dive into one race, four laps, then it is the next one. I travelled around Europe doing that and it was highly enjoyable."

Question: Do you still attend British Touring Car Championship races or keep an eye on the championship?
Dyfan Evans
Via Facebook
BE: "I certainly keep an eye on it but I haven't been to any for a while because they are usually clashing with Formula 1. Or if it hasn't clashed, it is a rare weekend off. It is our top level of national motorsport and it really delivers, I love the series. It is fascinating and well-fought."

Question: Let's be blunt. Why did you step down from the Formula 1 commentary box and what plans do you have?
Daniel Francis
Twitter
BE: "I understand why people would question why on earth I would give up such an amazing role of commentating on Formula 1. I have now been commentating seriously since 1995. So that is 25 years now that I have been commentating and flying around the world. I haven't done F1 all that time, but I have done all sorts including Indycar. I did A1GP, FIA GT – I was doing a lot of travelling around the world. Doing this last decade of F1, I loved it and it was a real dream to get the gig with the BBC and then with Channel 4 but life is important to me too.

"F1 does tend to take over your life, and so it should when you are in a role like that – and that's true if you are a competitor in it, a journalist in it or a team member. It is something you have to be completely wrapped up in if you are going to deliver well. It is a competitive business, and it doesn't matter whether you are in the media or on the track, it is the height of the height in motorsport and you need to be utterly immersed in it, and I had been immersed in it for a long time. But I felt I wanted to be a little less immersed. I will keep an involvement in motorsport and with cars for the rest of my life, I know I will.

"What's happening next? You might hear my voice occasionally doing the odd substitute role for other commentators. So sometime this year, my voice will be heard…

"I definitely want to be involved in different forms of motorsport with some writing and some broadcasting, and I want to be able to get out in my Formula Ford car again."

Will you be out this year in your Formula Ford 1600 car?
Christine Denny
Facebook
BE: "Well I have entered for a race already! I am planning to race at Snetterton in April – one of the Heritage races that James Beckett organises. I have a Van Diemen RF92 which I bought six or seven years ago now which I have done odd bits of racing in over the time.

"I just wanted to have something that I could go and enjoy occasionally. I am not going to try and be a superstar driver again, I know that's long gone, but I still love Formula Ford.

"And also this year, one thing I would love to be able to do is the Formula Ford Festival, because it is the 50th. I am hoping to be on the grid, but even if I can't take part for whatever reason, I will be there and be involved."

Question: Do you have any racing regrets? Missed out on a drive or a job, for example, or a job in commentary?
Chris Phillips
Twitter
BE: "No, there are no regrets. When I decided to stop trying to be a racing driver and got into commentary, that was a big decision. I was still hopeful that I could make a career as a driver and it didn't happen. The commentary decision was made final, really, when I got the gig to do F1 for Eurosport. I realised that it was something important and I shouldn't be playing around with still trying to be a professional racing driver when that job was on the table.

"I am proud of what I have achieved in commentary, although it didn't always go to plan. When I lost the F1 gig with Eurosport after two years because the rights changed, I tried to get in with ITV and they didn't want me because they had Murray Walker and James Allen. I did F1 for FOM for one year. It took a long, long time to get the terrestrial F1 gig, but I got there in the end."
MN: Do people recognise your voice?
BE: "I was seen a little bit on air on Channel 4 and I have been stopped once or twice when walking through my local Norfolk town of Diss and thanked for my input to F1. To hear that from a genuine TV spectator has always meant a lot to me." ■

Edwards plans to spend more time at the wheel of his Van Diemen

This CART finish in Michigan in 2000 produced an epic commentary

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FEATURE

WHEN MOTORSPORT GOES BEYOND A JOKE

We explore some of the left-field ideas that were fit for a believable April 1 prank

Motorsport is full of fresh thinking an innovation. It is one of the most appealing aspects that sets it apart from many other sports and competition. The drive to push the boundaries comes from all angles and it is as important as the urgency against the stopwatch.

The constant pressure to reinvent technologies and the challenges that motorsport presents can lead organisers, engineers and the rulemakers to think in some highly unusual ways. And there are those ideas, too, which go just that bit too far.

It just so happens that this issue of Motorsport News hits the news stands on April 1, so we thought it was appropriate for us to take a look back at some of the more outlandish ideas that have made the headlines in this newspaper. If you think there is something we have missed or a particular favourite of yours, feel free to contact us at matt.james@kelsey.co.uk.

STEERING FROM THE REAR

Fiat tries a new hotseat in World rallying

Geistdorfer was placed in the back of the Fiat 131

The Fiat 131 was a glorious car. The Italian firm's rear-wheel-drive icon, draped in its Alitalia livery, was a potent force in World rallying with Markku Alen winning the FIA Cup for Drivers in 1978. That individual success helped Fiat to its second straight World title for Makes, and it would win another in 1980.

The success came before Audi burst onto the scene with four-wheel drive. The rear-motivated 131 was up against the Ford Escort Mk2s and Vauxhall Chevettes, which all used a similar drivetrain layout.

That meant performance was all about maximising the grip from the rear of the cars, and Fiat came up with a novel solution for the RAC Rally in 1978. Christian Geistdorfer, Walter Rohrl's co-driver got a unique view as he was placed in the back of the car. The weight of the co-driver closer to the rear axle helped the traction and the German driver to finish in sixth place in the event, behind winner Hannu Mikkola's Eaton Yale-supported Escort. Rulemakers enjoyed the curio but move swiftly to outlaw the practice in future events.

Matt James

Rohrl was sixth on the RAC

SCHUMACHER'S WIN IS THE PITS

A bonkers end to the 1998 British Grand Prix

Is it still a race win if the victor doesn't take the flag? Discuss...

Never had likeable Alex Wurz hit the headlines like he did following a sodden British Grand Prix in 1998.

It had been alleged that Michael Schumacher had whizzed by the Austrian's Benetton under the safety car in the drizzle at Silverstone and the leader's Ferrari was under scrutiny.

The Ferrari top brass on the pitwall were notified of a 10-second censure that had been handed out to its star man, and decided to argue the case as it was unsure whether it was 10-second added to his race time, or a 10-second stop-and-go penalty. Schumacher was far enough ahead to have taken a stop-go and still emerged in the lead but, to make sure its belt and braces were tightened, the Scuderia decided to call in its driver on the final lap anyway.

He complied but did so on the very final lap. That meant he crossed the timing line, which covers the track *and* the pitlane entrance, before actually coming to a halt.

The crowd was looking for a winner to cross the line, and it didn't get one. Cue many scratched heads. It was all very ugly but ultimately, it mattered not as the penalty was later rescinded anyway...

Matt James

TRUCK RACING

The big noise from the big rigs

Donington was the spiritual home of the monsters of truck racing

You what? Truck racing? You must be nuts! That was largely the reaction CSS Promotions head Andrew Marriott received when he made public the plan for the first Multipart Truck Grand Prix, to be held at Donington in September 1984.

A whacky idea from America, and gaining traction in Holland, it was *Truck Magazine* editor Andrew Frankl who came to Marriott and they approached Multipart to back the project. So far, so good.

But there were no rules, no regulations, so Marriott set about effectively inventing the category. Classes were split around horsepower and an entry grew with a number of ringers, like Martin Brundle and Steve Parrish, existing truckers like Mel Bacon in the Union Jack-adorned Leyland Roadtrain, car racers like TVR hero John Kent and eventual winner Duilio Ghislotti who had starred in an Alfa Romeo GTV6 in the European Touring Car Championship.

Not knowing whether to expect 500 people or 5000, something like 60,000 curious fans poured into Donington, created Guinness Book of Record-entering traffic jams back to the M1 and revelled in the birth of a new form of motorsport.

Gimmick? A year later Brands Hatch and Silverstone were also running truck events...

David Addison

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com, Motorsport Images

Tyrrell managed to keep the P34 chassis a secret

THE SIX-WHEELER TYRRELL

The joy of six appeal for British team as it seeks an aero advantage

It is hard to keep anything secret in Formula 1, and this was even true in the 1970s. The rumour mill was as rife as it ever has been, but this innovation truly blindsided the assembled media when it was revealed in a hotel in Heathrow in September, 1975.

The team had placed trusses in the tarpaulin draped over the car so as not to give the game away before the covers were whipped off. Even then, the assembled media refused to believe that the racer was anything more than a publicity stunt.

It certainly wasn't. The thinking behind the Derek Gardner-designed P34 was to maximise the airflow over the front of the car while reducing drag at the same time, and it made its race debut in 1976 in the hands of Patrick Depailler in the fourth round of the year in Spain, with team-mate Jody Scheckter switching to his version one race later.

Of course, the P34 required bespoke Goodyear tyres, and the extra effort required meant it was never on the latest development rubber. Scheckter won the Swedish GP in 1976 and finished third in the World championship, but that was the height of the car's glory.

Matt James

NISSAN'S FOLLY

Japanese firm decides to attack from the front

Le Mans in 2015 was not a success

Nissan's objective when it entered Le Mans in 2015 was not to follow the lead of its rivals. Audi had been the dominant force in sportscar racing for more than a decade, and the Japanese firm wanted to stamp its own flavour on its programme.

It certainly did that. It's GT-R LM Nismo did an about-face with convention, literally.

The Ben Bowlby-designed car featured front-engine placement that hadn't been used at La Sarthe for 12 years at that point. And even more radically, it employed a front-wheel-drive configuration. It wasn't helped when, in the pre-race build up, team bosses confidently predicted that they would win the twice-around-the-clock event.

The firm found out pretty quickly why no other team had attempted this format in the modern generation. The three machines, which were supposed to benefit from a svelte rear end to reduce drag on the long straights in France, qualified last in LMP1. And, as they hadn't reached the 110% lap time of the pole-winning car, they were put to the back of the prototype line-up.

Gearbox and suspension woes did for two-thirds of the entry after 234 laps. The Harry Tincknell, Alex Buncombe and Michael Krumm version was not classified, having completed only 242 laps compared to the winning Porsche's 395...

Matt James

PLAYING THE JOKER

Going the extra mile in rallycross to spice up the competition

Most people thought that Bernie Ecclestone was off his rocker when he thought that a sprinkler system next to the circuits would spice up F1. When he voiced that in 2010, he had obviously been keeping up with rallycross too, because his other plan was a 'joker' section, to give a driver an on-track advantage.

Rallycross has embraced the introduction of the 'extra section' of track, which must be taken once during each race, for many seasons. The origination of the idea is thought to date back to 2002 when it was introduced in Sweden by Svend Hansen.

When the FIA granted a World championship status to rallycross in 2014, it formally became part of a top-flight series for the first time. The extra section of track in rallycross elongates the lap and is a penalty, in truth. It serves up some tactical masterclasses as drivers either use it to find an unimpeded track or save it to the end, creating a dash to the flag. It has certainly proved a hit in the mixed-surface discipline. Maybe Bernie was onto something, after all...

Dashing to the line after a late joker lap detour

Matt James

THE ESTATE OF THE NATION

Volvo kicks off its boots in the BTCC

The decision for Volvo to rip up convention in the British Touring Car Championship and enter an estate-shaped 850 in 1994 wasn't folly. TWR was running the cars and had done the sums and worked out that the aero was better on the elongated car than it was on the saloon-shaped one.

They kept that news from the drivers though, as Rickard Rydell, who was partnered with the experienced Jan Lammers, remembers. "When I joined up for Volvo and TWR around Christmas 1993, I didn't know about the estate plans. If I'd known, I would probably have hesitated. It was lucky I didn't know!

"We hadn't had time to test the car on the track before its launch at Thruxton in April," remembers Rydell. "Jan and I had been able to drive a few hundred metres at the entrance to TWR's development workshop, but that was all.

"There were a few taunts from other drivers – but that was no problem. To wind them up, in one heat we drove with a large stuffed collie in the boot during the parade lap!"

While the car ticked boxed in terms of generating the publicity the Swedish firm was after, the high-up weight on the rear of the car with the extra metal needed for an estate was a step too far. The team finished the season with a clutch of top six placings before plotting a saloon car for 1995.

Matt James

THE BIRMINGHAM SUPERPRIX

The Monaco of the Midlands – eventually

Street racing on the UK mainland: few concepts combine such a low amount of realism with such a high amount of speculation (see the persistent London race chatter). It never fails to be a wonderful concept inside your head, but before you make it reality there is logistics, disruption, any number of nimbies... Back in the day you also needed specific Road Traffic Act-suspending legislation. And all this in Birmingham?

Yet it happened, and it took the sheer determination of Martin Hone. The efforts to hold a Birmingham street race stretched back to the early 1970s, and involved wrangling, planning plus obstacles and setbacks. But Hone had resolve.

And eventually the legislation arrived with the Birmingham Road Race Bill passed by Parliament. For 1986 the Birmingham Superprix was reality for Formula 3000. And for five years the late-August bank holiday event was a glorious feature. Hone by this time had the event ripped from his control, but that's another story...

F3000: The streets came alive

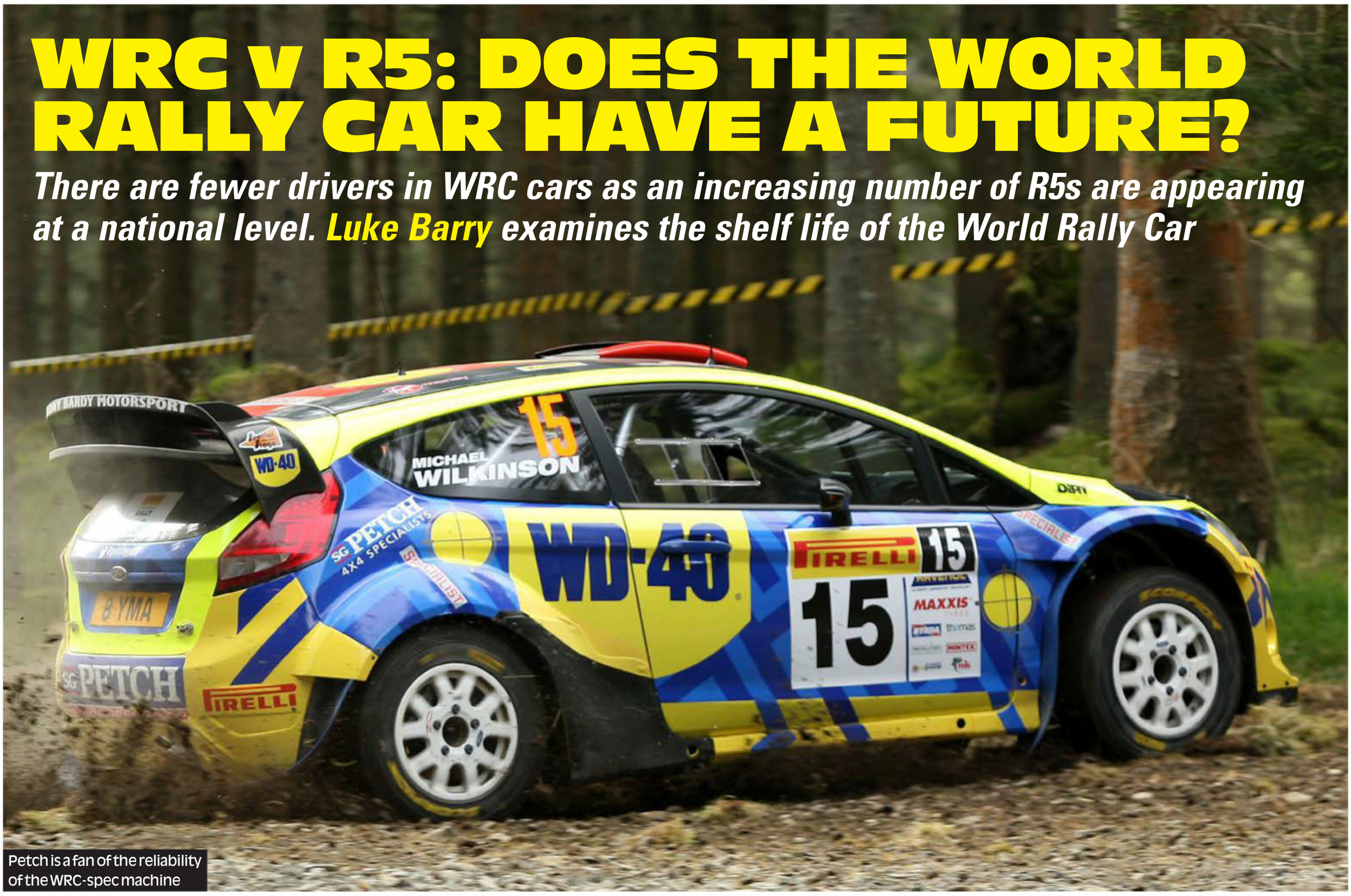
Graham Keilloh

Advertising enquiries: 01732 446757

FEATURE

WRC v R5: DOES THE WORLD RALLY CAR HAVE A FUTURE?

*There are fewer drivers in WRC cars as an increasing number of R5s are appearing at a national level. **Luke Barry** examines the shelf life of the World Rally Car*



Petch is a fan of the reliability of the WRC-spec machine

For multiple generations, one car was king. Ever since the year 2000 when Marcus Gronholm took his Peugeot 206 WRC to World Rally Championship glory, a World Rally Car has topped the tree on the World stage. But is a baton about to be passed? For 2022, the World Rally Car ruleset is set to come to an end after 25 years of competition to be replaced by Rally1 which, in a first for World rallying, incorporates hybrid technology.

It's a familiar tale elsewhere too. The European Rally Championship, for example outlawed WRC cars as early as 2004 while the British Rally Championship did so for its 2006 season. Drivers in the Irish Tarmac Championship kicked the ball for much longer, with the cars being allowed for an extra decade until 2016 but look anywhere in the World now, and the FIA-homologated cars topping the timesheets will be R5s – now, in the case of the very latest cars, referred to as Rally2s.

The World Rally Car is still able to compete in national championships, but with evolutions of R5 cars continually being rolled out and the inability for private customers to realistically get their hands on the very latest World Rally Car tech – due to the hike in power, aerodynamics and subsequently cost – the number of WRC cars on the British and Irish stages is diminishing.

Some key stalwarts of the World Rally Car platform have made the jump. For years Steve Simpson rallied a Subaru Impreza S12 and S12B WRC in the UK Asphalt Championship, but he jumped into a Fiesta R5 for the 2018 season. One of his chief rivals, Damian Cole – who has driven Subaru, Hyundai or Ford WRC cars since 2003 – has also taken the plunge into R5 for 2021 as he'll pedal a Skoda, acting on advice that the R5 cars are actually faster than the best WRC machinery.

Even Garry Jennings, who stubbornly stuck with his Impreza S12B WRC and thus ruled himself out of Irish Tarmac title contention as everyone else switched to R5, has got his hands on a Ford Fiesta and said "compared to my World car it just felt so good".

David Bogie, who along with Stephen Petch and Alex Laffey was among the first group to drive an R5 in the UK back in 2014, tells MN. "At that point I'd been down at Greystoke and had a run in the car and I was very impressed with the R5 car. The chassis, the traction it could generate, the power delivery, the braking, the turn-in; everything was an improvement over the 2002 World Rally Car," Bogie says in reference to his outgoing Focus WRC. "[They're] great cars using the latest technology and it wasn't a move I regretted anyway that's for sure."

Bogie ran his Fiesta in R5+ form, which meant it featured a more advanced rear spoiler, didn't have a pop-off valve, ran with a 34mm restrictor as opposed to 32mm and was equipped with a Focus WRC turbo. "It was a fair bit of power difference to be honest," Bogie admits. "However that was the early R5, thereafter they managed to find masses of power which then closed the difference between R5 and R5+."

In R5+ form though, the R5s were already taking it to the World Rally Cars in the early phases of their competition life. The 2015 Granite City Rally will live long in the memory as Bogie duked it out against Dave Weston Jr – that year's BTRDA Gold Star champion – who drove a Subaru Impreza S12B WRC, recognised as one of the finest and quickest WRC cars ever produced along with the Ford Focus WRC07.

Bogie and Weston Jr were incredibly closely matched that day and, indeed, couldn't be separated at the end of the event, Weston Jr taking the victory on the tiebreak rule. It was a thrilling contest but perhaps in hindsight marked a potential changing of the guard between the two types of cars.

"I think R5 really hit the nail on the head: 1600cc, turbocharged, four-wheel drive – perfect," says Bogie. "And of course [with] all these different countries buying into the R5 concept and outlawing World Rally Cars, the fact that I could take my car to the Irish Tarmac Championship or the Scottish championship, BTRDA, BRC, Belgium and be competitive right across the board for me that was a massive selling point. And things move on, times move on."

Petch sees things differently, however. He too competed with a Fiesta R5+ but had a "dismal season" with the car in 2015. Having moved from a Focus WRC08 to the R5 because he "wanted something new and competitive to a degree on a national level" Petch reverted to a World Rally Car for 2017, picking up an ex-Lorenzo Bertelli Fiesta WRC.

"It was the strength element I wanted more than anything," he says, "because I'm probably not the most delicate person with a car if I'm being honest. I'm not like a Matt Edwards or somebody like that who's a bit more smooth, I'm a little bit more wayward, sideways and I tend to clip quite a lot of bits and pieces.

"I just felt with the money I was chucking in to maintain the R5 with driveshafts in and this, that and the other after every rally… I know I'm spending more money on the World Rally Car but really it runs a season without a problem unless you smash into something."

Running costs are a major factor to consider with World Rally Cars. In fact, they had a major influence as to why Mark Kelly selected a Ford Fiesta R5 last year when he decided he wanted to

Petch swapped back to WRC car

> **"The R5 car hit the nail right on the head"**
>
> **David Bogie**

Bogie enjoys the nimble R5 cars

Preston felt the cost of switch

Photos: Jakob Ebrey, Chicane Media, SMJ Photography

Bogie was successful in his Ford Focus WRC

"The WRC car tends to be more robust"

Stephen Petch

Pritchard says the parts and service for his Focus aren't a problem

Bogie moved to R5 in 2014

step up from his Ford Escort Mk2. Thomas Preston, who campaigned a Skoda Fabia R5 for three-and-a-half-years before buying a Fiesta WRC, confessed to MN the costs to run the Ford are "not double but it's not far off" the Skoda's regular bills. Kelly heard similar.

"The most important point would be the running costs," Kelly affirms. "The car I would absolutely love and if I could have anything it would be this car: it would be the [Subaru Impreza] S11. But having spoken to Chris Ford, they're older now and consequently parts are not as readily available. I'd love to take my brain out and not worry about the costs and go for an S11 but the reality is when it comes to rallying regularly, the newer the car the chances are it's going to be more reliable and anything you do need it's on a shelf up the road. That's what swung it really to be fair. I think everyone would love a World car if they were in a position to."

Jason Pritchard has remained firmly in the World Rally Car camp for years. He first drove a Focus WRC05 in 2012 and since has dovetailed rallies in it with historic events in a Ford Escort Mk2. Pritchard, who sells cars for a living, argues that the World Rally Car is a far better investment than it might appear.

"With what we're doing the World car is good enough obviously, it's won the championships," the 2018 and '19 Asphalt champion says. "With an R5, obviously to be at the front you've got to have the latest equipment and then you've got the upgrades as well, so you have a new car at the start of the season, [but] it loses money. We're into car sales, we don't buy cars to lose money: we buy them to make money, so chucking money after an R5 goes against the grain. The World cars now are appreciating in value."

Pritchard believes so long as the cars are looked after properly, they can still be used regularly in competition: "Paul Benn has got the bits there now to run these cars," he says. "He's got basically everything on the shelf there ready to go. I think that's what puts a lot of people off is the cars getting older and getting the bits but that's not a problem with these cars now."

Another argument that crops up regularly is the fit and finish of the WRC cars compared to the R5. As Pritchard puts it: "An R5 is built to a budget – the welding, the wiring, the carbon bits; the attention to detail's not in them."

Bogie even likens the WRC cars to a NASA spaceship or a fighter jet because "there was just so much going on. Whereas in an R5 car you jump in, you start the car up and when you're ready to go into the stage you push the R5 button and away you go."

However what matters most to a rally driver is speed and performance, so which is actually quicker: an R5 or a World Rally Car? The 2019 North West Stages is an interesting case study as Peter Taylor's Fiesta WRC was run extremely close by Laffey's R5 version and Neil Simpson's Skoda R5. In the end Taylor edged it but only by five seconds over the tying Laffey and Simpson.

"I would say anybody with the latest R5, it's going to be very, very close," says Petch. "If I was a World championship driver in a World car like mine compared to somebody in an R5 I'd probably suggest that yes there'd be an advantage of one second a mile or two seconds a mile, but for people who drive them part-time like we do, point-and-squirt performance is pretty much the same."

Preston concurs. He says: "For a national driver which I'd class myself as I think they're quicker but I don't think they're night-and-day quicker."

Bogie believes it can be depend on the event: "It's kind of horses for courses. When you've got big, wide open roads of course the faster car will generally win or be the best tool for that job and with the two-litre World Rally Cars, your S12Bs for example, they've masses of power and masses of torque.

"However, when it comes to how the car brakes, handles and turns in I feel the R5 car is better in all those areas. On the likes of fast stages in Donegal, the older World cars are always getting the jump over the R5 but across the board, taking all stages into account, I think the R5 car can certainly punch above its weight."

While the R5 cars have invaded the WRC equivalent's spot as the premier class in several international championships, the jury remains out at a national level.

What's clear, however, is the gap between the cars has never been closer, and perhaps we are fast approaching a tipping point where the R5 car will not only be cheaper and more modern, but also undeniably quicker in the majority of conditions too. If that happens, you'll likely only be seeing a World Rally Car in museums or on showpiece events… ■

LUKE BARRY

RALLY JOURNALIST

"As impressive as WRC2 is, no-one really wants to be there"

Believe it or not, the World Rally Car ruleset is the same age as me – I'll let you decide which has aged better. But based on that useless fact alone, it's clear to see why the formula is perhaps ebbing away compared to its glory days. WRC cars are still at the top of the tree in World rallying, but the most up-to-date version any UK privateer can realistically get their hands on is now five years old.

R5 – or, should I say, Rally2 – cars meanwhile are continually being developed and are progressing rapidly as a consequence. Several manufacturers have skin in the game, which is pushing each car to be that little bit better and it's showing in their pace. Mads Ostberg's two attempts of the Cala Flumini stage on last year's Rally Sardinia in a Citroen C3 R5 for instance work out to be 1.8 seconds faster than Thierry Neuville's benchmark in a Hyundai NG i20 WRC four years earlier…

It does raise the question: why would anybody bother running a World Rally Car in competition? They're far more expensive and potentially slower too. But that's overlooking the theatre of a WRC car. The best way of putting it is when watching a rally, I get excited about seeing a World Rally Car; I don't necessarily get excited by an R5 car. Instead, what excites with R5 cars is the closeness of the competition.

Driving a WRC car comes with the added kick of being able to mimic rallying heroes too. As impressive as the WRC2 roster is in 2021 for example, nobody really wants to be there; they want to be in WRC. No current Ford Fiesta Rally2 driver is going to drive their car and feel like they're Adrien Fourmaux. To them, Fourmaux is a yardstick or even a rival.

But a current Ford Fiesta WRC driver can very easily feel like they're Mikko Hirvonen or Jari-Matti Latvala as neither driver is active and the car was used in the top echelon of the WRC, not the second tier.

Ultimately, it all depends on what you want from your rallying. If you're a driver aspiring to progress or wanting to be as competitive as possible in a given championship, buying or hiring an R5/Rally2 car probably makes most sense. But if you've got a bigger budget, fancy a little bit extra horsepower and something with more pedigree that could one day become a collector's item, World Rally Cars are still more than quick enough to ensure you can have your cake and eat it too.

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FEATURE

SIMPLIFYING THE ROUTE MAP TO THE TOP OF THE RALLYING WORLD

Graham Lister has examined – and explains – the new rallying pyramid of progression

WRC cars will be replaced by Rally1 hybrid machines

R5 category, now Rally2, remains European Championship's top level

In 1971, Bill Harkin – who passed away last month – designed and built the Glastonbury Festival's first Pyramid Stage.

Fifty years later, Yves Matton, the FIA's rally boss, can lay claim to a pyramid of his own.

But while Harkin's iconic structure has undergone several redesigns and rebuilds over the years, there was only ever one Pyramid Stage at any one time.

Matton, however, has two pyramids or, to be precise, the FIA Rally Sporting Pyramid is essentially two pyramids rolled into one.

Confused? Really, there's no need to be because it all becomes clear from a glimpse at the FIA Rally Cars Pyramid, meaning it's actually 3-1 to Matton on the pyramid count.

The FIA Rally Cars Pyramid actually dates back to 2018 when the World Motor Sport Council approved a new ladder with World Rally Cars (read Rally1 cars from 2022) on the top rung and Rally5 (previously known as R1 cars) on the bottom.

Matton reasoned, quite sensibly, that if Formula 1 was the summit of the single-seater ladder followed by Formula 2, Formula 3 and Formula 4, then the smallest figure should top rallying's pyramid, hence the adoption of new nomenclature.

This has included R5 cars becoming Rally2 cars, R2 cars becoming Rally4 cars and R1 cars becoming Rally5 cars.

From this season Rally3, the FIA's affordable four-wheel-drive category that seeks to provide an affordable and accessible step between Rally4 to Rally2, enters the fray.

There are a couple of abnormalities in RGT (think rally-ready Porsche 997 GT3s, Abarth 124s, Alpine A110s and the like) and Rally2 Kit, the new name for unloved and largely untried R4 Kit class, essentially a Group N with attitude through the use of a kit of performance parts.

But, otherwise, that's the FIA Rally Cars Pyramid in a nutshell.

Now for the FIA Rally Sporting Pyramid, which comes into effect from 2022 – sufficient time to allow for the fine-tuning of the rules and for drivers and teams to choose their career route accordingly and for event organisers to understand what's going on.

Although, visually, the FIA Rally Sporting Pyramid is two sets of rectangles, each provides two different but, to a certain extent, entwined career paths for drivers starting out at international level to follow, so there's actually really one structure to climb, meaning Harkin and Matton have more in common than first thought.

The FIA Rally Sporting Pyramid begins at European championship level with the new ERC4 category as the starting point for drivers in Rally4 or Rally5 cars.

ERC4 is divided into an Open class with no maximum age limit and a Junior class for drivers 27 or under at the start of each season.

From ERC4, a driver progresses to ERC3 for Rally3 cars. Again, there's an Open class with no maximum age limit and this time a Junior class for drivers 28 or under at the start of each campaign.

At this stage, a driver can continue in the ERC by stepping up to the ERC class for Rally2 cars (as the ERC's top-level category, the FIA wisely opted against calling it ERC2), or they can move sideways to WRC3 for Rally3 cars where an Open and Junior class (for drivers 28 or under at the start of each season) will exist.

The route can take a driver to the Rally2-based WRC2 and to an Open class and Junior class, for drivers 30 and under at the start of the season. Or they can head to ERC and progress to Rally2 machinery, with the goal of becoming European champion, in effect.

The WRC category for Rally1 cars – the FIA's new hybrid-based formula from 2022 – sits at the top of the pyramid with titles for the top driver and make. For ERC4, ERC3, ERC, WRC3 and WRC2 there are titles for teams and drivers, but not manufacturers.

In addition, the FIA Rally Sporting Pyramid specifies that only Rally1, Rally2, Rally3, Rally4, Rally5 and RGT cars will be eligible for championships

Photos: FIA ERC, Taneli Niinimaki/AKK, mcklein-imagedatabase.com

TOP LEVEL Rally1 cars	**WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP**
SECOND LEVEL Rally2 cars	**WRC2 OPEN** **WRC2 JUNIOR (Under 30s)** **EUROPEAN RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP**
THIRD LEVEL Rally3 cars	**WRC3 OPEN** **WRC3 JUNIOR (Under 29s)** **ERC OPEN** **ERC JUNIOR (Under 28s)**
FOURTH LEVEL Rally4 and Rally5 cars	**ERC4 JUNIOR (Under 27s)** **ERC4 OPEN**

Front-wheel-drive Rally5 cars will be the rallying stepping off point

FIA RALLY CARS

Need to know the difference between a Rally1 and a Rally4? Check out MN's quick guide.

Rally1
Engine: 1.6-litre turbo (36mm restrictor)
Power: 380hp (+10hp with plug-in hybrid
Transmission: Four-wheel drive
Minimum weight: 1190kg
Price: £550,000 (estimated)

Rally2
Engine: 1.6-litre turbo (32mm restrictor)
Power: 290hp
Transmission: Four-wheel drive
Minimum weight: 1230kg
Price: £170,000 (maximum)

Rally3
Engine: Up to 2.0-litre normally aspirated, 1.6-litre turbo (30mm restrictor)
Power: 215bhp
Transmission: Four-wheel drive
Minimum weight: 1210kg
Price: £85,000 (maximum)

Rally4
Engine: Up to 2.0-litre normally aspirated, 1.3-litre turbo (30mm restrictor)
Power: 210hp
Transmission: Two-wheel drive
Minimum weight: 1080kg
Price: £60,000 (approximate)

Rally5
Engine: Up to 1.6-litre normally aspirated, 1.3-litre turbo
Power: 150hp
Transmission: Two-wheel drive
Minimum weight: 1030kg
Price: £34,000 (approximate)

Rally4 cars will be able to battle for titles in the FIA European series

The WRC3 level will run for the Rally3 spec of car

How M-Sport is at the hub of the new rallying ladder

For British firm M-Sport, the FIA's Rally Sporting Pyramid is the perfect shop window for its Cumbria and Krakow-built products.

The company is active at all levels from Rally5 to the new-for-2022 Rally1 and is currently the only manufacturer present in the Rally3 market.

It took part in the initial discussions with the FIA – along with several other unnamed makes – and therefore got the chance to have an input on the rulebook, particularly when it came to keeping costs under control.

"It's a really exciting project and a very interesting car," M-Sport Poland head Maciej Woda says of the Rally3 category. "We have been working with the FIA for a number of years and we have a very good relationship. Rally3 was a completely new concept and honestly I can't wait to see a lot of these cars on the stages. In fact, a lot of people have been waiting a long time for this car.

"Some people see it as a replacement for the old Group N cars, like the Mitsubishis and the Subarus, but we never approached this project in this way. In my opinion we needed a car for young drivers to make the step from two-wheel-drive Rally4 cars to the very fast and competitive Rally2 cars because the step is very big now.

"The Rally3 will be faster than the Rally4, not much more power but more torque and it's easier to drive is the comment we've received from a lot of drivers who have tested it.

"It's also proven to be robust from the testing we've done, it's cost-effective and fun to drive."

Jerome Roussel, the FIA's regional rally boss, said: "We believe very strongly in the Rally3 concept and we share the same passion as M-Sport when it comes to helping young drivers."

adopting the pyramid, which will also include the FIA's African, Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Nacam regional competitions in the future.

RGT cars won't quite fit into the Rally Sporting Pyramid but will be permitted on World and European championship events in standalone categories. Rally2 Kit cars will be absorbed into the ERC category, while the current ERC2 for Group N cars, RGTs and Rally2 Kits will disappear.

So why go to all the trouble?

Just like Harkin did when he approached Glastonbury founder Michael Eavis about building his Pyramid Stage, Matton had a clear vision when he took the FIA's top rallying job three years ago.

"It's the last stage of a process that started when we created the FIA Rally Cars Pyramid," Matton explains. "Some categories were beginning to disappear, like Group N, some categories were at the same level, like the old R2 and R3 categories, and now we have Rally3 coming in. From 2022, there is a pathway from the lowest level to the highest that's easy to understand."

Matton and his team at the FIA in Geneva identified six targets when formalising the Rally Sporting Pyramid with the repositioning of the ERC as, according to the governing body, "both a feeder to the WRC and a goal in itself for drivers and teams", central to the plan.

Firstly, they identified the need to align the Rally Sporting Pyramid with the Rally Cars Pyramid. They then needed to match the championship names with the group names (for example WRC3 is for Rally3 cars not Rally2 cars as things stand). They also wanted to make their "sporting pathway more understandable", while "increasing accessibility with different categories to suit different customer requirements". The decision was also made to only award titles if there are enough drivers entered on events.

"The pyramid allows each championship to have its own personality," Matton says. "With a Rally2 car, you can win the ERC and it can be your goal. But, with the same car, the same driver can go to WRC2, try to win the championship and then grow further as a professional driver in the future.

"Each championship will have the same names for the car groups and the categories within them to make things much more obvious and easily understandable for everyone. It has not been possible to do it before but now we are at the final step of this process.

"While they will be able to compete on all rallies, we won't have a specific category for two-wheel-drive cars in the WRC framework. With a championship that's mainly based on gravel and with the new Rally1 cars, it will be difficult for these kinds of cars to compete consistently on the same events.

"But in the European championship, where you have more Tarmac events and more accessible categories for Rally5 or Rally4 cars, this championship is perfect for these cars and it really makes sense. We believe both championships should be equally strong."

Forever the poor relation to the WRC, trashed by many who fail or simply don't want to understand its purpose – namely a feeder to the top tier or a chance for more drivers to compete abroad for an affordable price – through misguided fear that it's some kind of threat, the ERC rarely gets a break.

For the first time, the FIA has officially recognised the championship as a legitimate career route. It's also positioned the ERC as the official first step on the international ladder by effectively changing the status of the Junior WRC.

The ERC4 class will be *the* starting point as the only international-standard category for two-wheel-drive Rally4 and Rally5 cars, while the JWRC will become WRC3 Junior, but for four-wheel-drive Rally3 machinery, the step up from Rally4 and Rally5.

ERC promoter Eurosport Events should also take heart from the fact that its groundbreaking junior class for Rally2 cars will now be adopted in the WRC. While there is a risk that once a driver is ready to step up from Rally4 they might miss out the ERC and follow a WRC route only, the fact drivers are being encouraged to start on the road to the top of the WRC by competing in the ERC is a big opportunity for the European championship.

It's unsurprising, therefore, that Eurosport Events has latched onto this chance by altering the format of its Junior championships by calling time on ERC1 Junior for Rally2 cars and making ERC Junior for Rally3 machines the top of its young driver tree.

The Paris-based firm has also changed the prize structure and is handing its ERC3 Junior champion (the current name for its entry-level Rally4 and Rally5 division) an ERC Junior programme in 2022 (six events if they win ERC3 Junior in a Fiesta Rally4 or three rounds if they're in a car from another make). The ERC Junior champion can look forward to a season in WRC3 Junior in a Fiesta Rally3.

It's all part of a four-way deal between Eurosport Events, the FIA, M-Sport and Pirelli, which was brokered by ERC boss Jean-Baptiste Ley.

"It would be easy to rest on our laurels after a very good ERC1 Junior season [in 2020] when several of our young drivers scored overall podiums and victories," Ley says. "But we made two important observations. The first is that those drivers have demonstrated they have what it takes to challenge for the overall title and that's what we hope they will continue to do [this] season. At the same time, it's clear the step between ERC3 Junior for two-wheel drive and ERC1 Junior for four-wheel drive is not getting any smaller, while the finances required are proving increasingly harder to obtain due to the global pandemic. The Rally3 category is therefore the perfect answer to the needs of ERC Junior with a smart balance between cost and 4WD experience."

The original Pyramid Stage took three months to build, while the FIA's Rally Sporting Pyramid has been three years in the making. Like the name of the Somerset farm where the current Pyramid Stage stands, the Rally Sporting Pyramid is a Worthy addition to the international rallying universe. ■

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COLUMNIST

LOUIS FOSTER

British rising star has a 2021 Euroformula title aim – then has an American dream to fulfil

Photos: Miguel Reis, Jakob Ebrey

Foster is to race with Motopark

Foster to pursue American single-seater dream

It's a good weight off the shoulders to know we're going to be racing this year and what we're going to be doing. I'll be competing in Euroformula Open with reigning champion CryptoTower Racing Team backed by Motopark.

I had a difficult decision to choose between Motopark and Double R, which I've been a frontrunner with for the last two years in BRDC British Formula 3 and British Formula 4. But Motopark is the most successful team in Euroformula; you look at the results and it's just doing something right. I'm a little bit sad I'm leaving Double R though, it's really helped my development and I can't thank the team enough.

Motopark is a really nice team and very professional. It is quite international, and with different backgrounds in racing comes different perspectives and that adds up to a successfully engineered car.

I've already had a preview of Euroformula racing in a couple of rounds towards the end of last year with Double R, and I won on my debut weekend!

The opportunity was a little bit on the spot; I was really excited because I'd never raced outside the UK other than going to Chennai last year. I hadn't driven the Euroformula car before and had one test day at Pembrey in the pouring rain. At Spa for our first Euroformula meeting we jumped into the car and got settled in right away, and won the second race of the weekend. There was luck with the front two guys taking each other out but I still would have got a podium.

Then at Barcelona we again had good pace. Due to issues we only had one real proper qualifying session and in that we were P4, two tenths off pole and very close to P2. And I came second in that race.

It was all a surprise because Euroformula is a competitive series with really good drivers. I was hoping for the top 10 but I wasn't expecting to go out there and win and be challenging for podiums right off the bat.

My qualifying has come on a lot in the last few years. Back in Ginetta Juniors I always qualified very poorly and raced my way to the front, then in F4 and F3 my qualifying got better and better. And, not to sound cocky, my racecraft is among the best. I've never been outraced by a driver from memory.

Because I did well and now have some experience of Euroformula, the only decision for this year was to return. Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine was an option but we had some issues with weight, I'm six foot and quite heavy for a single-seater driver and don't have much weight to lose. It is something I wish was changed about single-seaters.

Motopark's Euroformula Dallara 320 feels like a completely different car to Double R's because of the way the team set it up. Double R's car was very entry focused whereas Motopark's car is the opposite, you keep a bit of entry speed up to get good exit. But sometimes you've got to step out of your comfort zone which is what we're doing.

Foster is sad to be leaving the Double R team

I prefer the Euroformula car to those in British F3 and F4 because it's a more clean way of driving. The Euroformula car is a lot more planted, and its 0 to 60 is a lot faster. With the British F3 car you can plant the throttle; in the Euroformula car you've got to be very careful on it. It's more rewarding, more precise and feels like more of a formula race car.

This year will be very very busy, as towards end of the year I'm moving to the United States to live. The initial reason for moving was that I'm looking to do IndyCar. It's a more realistic career ambition over something like Formula 1. And then I realised that I could also study out there, because racing isn't 24-7. Unlike a lot of drivers these days I still care quite a lot about my education. Hopefully this time next year we will be signing a deal in an American single-seater series: Indy Lights, Formula Regional Americas or Indy Pro 2000.

In 2021 my racing aim is to win the Euroformula championship, but my ultimate year's aim is learn and develop as much as possible and if that means we're champion then we're champion. My Euroformula performances last year put pressure on me, but I have faith in myself and we're working hard towards repeating and bettering it.

Out of all the drivers that I know are doing Euroformula this year, or might be doing it, I can beat all of them. If you don't think that then you have already lost. And the better the drivers that race in the series the more developed I'll become.

"My racecraft is among the best: I've never been outraced by a driver from memory"

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GETTING OVER THE LINE

TECHNICAL COLUMN PROVIDED BY WITHAM MOTORSPORT – DISTRIBUTORS OF MOTUL AUTOMOTIVE LUBRICANTS

How Toyota and the Motul-backed Speedworks British GT programme will help unearth the next generation of sportscar drivers in 2021

With GT racing becoming a more and more appealing route for young drivers to follow from the very early stages of their career, Motul's partner Speedworks Motorsport has opened up a pathway to unearth the next generation of sportscar superstars in 2021.

The team, which will run a brace of Motul-branded Toyota Corollas in the British Touring Car Championship this season for Rory Butcher and Sam Smelt, also has a foot in the British GT Championship camp. It ran the Toyota Supra GT4 machine in 2020 and was a podium finisher.

Team boss Christian Dick has teamed up with Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe [TGR-E] to help open a new pathway for up-and-coming drivers to benefit from all the tools that the team and the parent group have to offer.

A Young Driver Development scheme has been put in place, and Dick says it will be a huge boost to any racer who is selected. He explains: "There are some young driver initiatives around in GT racing, and we wanted to make sure we had a presence there too. We wanted to put something together so that aspiring racers know that TGR-E and Speedworks are interested in them and we wanted to help push them in the right direction as well as adding skills to their armoury that they might not get elsewhere."

The British GT Championship is one of the flagship domestic series in Europe and has become a beacon for a number of racers who are looking for a career in top-flight motorsport. Dick can see the appeal for a young driver who wants to have a career with a roof on his car.

"The British series is in rude health and you can see why it appeals to younger drivers now," says Dick. "There is interest from manufacturers, the talent is there and that helps the competition get stronger. It is self-fulfilling because all those factors help the value of the series gets stronger, which helps it to keep building the momentum for everyone involved."

Initially, the Speedworks scheme will co-opt one talent to the ladder, but the plan is to open up the initiative to more and more aspiring stars as the programme develops.

"It has got to be the right candidate for us to select them," says Dick. "We want to make sure that the drivers on the scheme are the right sort of drivers who will benefit from it. There will be extra effort, time, investment and resource put into them, so we have to be very careful about how the candidates are chosen. The plan is, should this scheme prove a success and when we have learned more about it, to roll it out in other championships across Europe."

The rear-wheel-drive Supra has already turned heads in maiden season in the British GT Championship

The Speedworks Motorsport Toyota Supra GT4

Boss Christian Dick is on the lookout for talent

The recipient, who will be aged 25 and under, will not only be part of Speedworks' line-up on the British GT grid, there are so many benefits that can come from Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe too.

The recipient will be able to enjoy TGR-E's high-tech simulator based in the firm's HQ in Cologne in Germany and will have access to Toyota's racing stars such as FIA World Endurance Championship winner Mike Conway.

"This scheme is about making those connections and opening doors for the young drivers that are going to help them as they move forward with their careers," explains Dick. "There is never a guarantee – this is motorsport – but we have a strong relationship with TGR-E and the scheme shows the interest it has in what we are doing and the drivers that are coming on board with us. It adds a lot of value to the whole deal. And this is not just a line a young driver will be able to put on the CV, there will be a tangible benefit to it."

Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe's managing director Rob Leupen says that teaming up with the Cheshire-based Speedworks team will help put the firm at the forefront of unearthing the next generation of stars.

He said: "The Toyota Gazoo Racing UK Young Driver Programme is a great initiative to support up-and-coming British talent and we are happy to cooperate with Speedworks. Christian and his team have a strong relationship with our colleagues at Toyota UK and participate in the BTCC under the Toyota Gazoo Racing UK banner, so they are already part of the Toyota Gazoo Racing family.

"The GR Supra GT4 has made a positive impression and we value the feedback and support of our customers, who have put their trust in TGR-E.

"With the UK Young Driver Programme, we intend to add further value while supporting Speedworks to nurture a new generation of British talent."

For more information please contact Witham Motorsport:
01353 723373 motul@withamgroup.co.uk
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WHAT'S ON

YOUTUBE

Edwards: real racer

It has been said for ex-driver commentators that their racing, it transpired, was mere preparation for their commentary career. Our Q&A guest this week Ben Edwards is known for commentary, yet also has a racing career to call on.

And YouTube offers a glimpse of it with the first-ever Formula First race, in 1987. It's at: youtube.com/watch?v=eVqELAPsz34 or via searching: 'Formula First – the first race'.

The 15 minutes start with an explanation of the new formula, the latest brainchild of famous John Webb, as an affordable equivalent of Formula Ford, which Formula Ford itself had grown away from.

Then attention turns to the inaugural race, for which 30 cars showed up at Brands Hatch. We quickly learn that the first polesitter is a rather green 21-year-old Brands racing instructor by the name of Ben Edwards. Sadly his race was short – or rather a non-existent – as his driveshaft failed on the startline.

Still there are plenty of notable names, particularly for touring car aficionados: Shaun Hollamby, Kelvin Burt, Eugene O'Brien… We also hear from Jonathan Palmer, a man who became very important in all matters Brands. And Edwards' misfortune wasn't enough to stop him claiming that year's inaugural Formula First championship.

Graham Keilloh

TV GUIDE

This weekend we have the first-ever round of Extreme E, the electric SUV contest with Jenson Button and Sebastien Loeb among its prestigious line-up. And its live coverage is supplemented with various auxiliary programmes. Today (Thursday) Sky Sports Action has a Climate Changers programme (1100hrs-1130hrs), followed by a season preview (1130hrs-1200hrs). While tomorrow (Friday) there's The Electric Dream (1030hrs-1130hrs) then the season preview's part two (11300hrs-1200hrs). Budding engineers also have How to Build an Extreme E car on Saturday morning (0930hrs-1000hrs). ITV4 also gets in on the preview show act early on Saturday (0615hrs-0645hhrs and 0645hrs-0720hrs) and has a magazine show early Sunday (0630hrs-0655hrs).

If you miss Extreme E's live action there are highlights of Saturday's running early on Sunday (0630hrs-0700hrs, Sky Sports Action), plus full weekend highlights that evening (2200hrs-2300hrs, Sky Sports Action).

Extreme E on a charge…

While Sky Sports F1 goes into chewing-the-fat mode mode about the Bahrain season-opener with its Weekend Debrief, today at 1230hrs-1300hrs then repeated variously.

Graham Keilloh

LIVE TV

EXTREME E
DESERT X PRIX
WADI RUM, ALULA, SAUDI ARABIA

- **Qualifying rounds 1-2:** Saturday, 0700hrs-0830hrs, Sky Sports Action, Sky Sports Main Event
- **Qualifying rounds 3-4:** Saturday, 1100hrs-1230hrs, Sky Sports Action
- **Semi-final 1-2 (Crazy race)** Sunday, 0700hrs-0830hrs, Sky Sports Action
- **Final:** Sunday, 1100hrs-1300hrs, Sky Sports Action, BT Sport 1, Eurosport 2; 1200hrs-1300hrs ITV1

LISTINGS

FRIDAY-SATURDAY
■ **Donington Park, Leics**
Masters Historic Festival: Historic F1, Endurance Legends, Masters Historic Sports, Gentleman Drivers, Pre 66 Touring Cars, Historic F2, Classic F3, Pre-1980 GT and Touring Cars **Starts** Friday, racing from 1225hrs (qualifying from 0905hrs) Saturday, racing from 1310hrs (qualifying from 0905hrs)

SATURDAY
■ **Oulton Park, Cheshire**
MSVR meeting: 7 Race Series, Heritage FF1600, Northern Sports/Saloons **Starts** racing from 1045hrs (qualifying from 0900hrs)

MONDAY
■ **Donington Park, Leics**
750MC meeting: Bike Sports, Porsches/Bernie's V8s, Club Enduro, 5 Club, Locost **Starts** racing from tba (qualifying from 0905hrs)
■ **Castle Combe, Wilts**
CCRC meeting: FF1600, Saloons, GT, Hot Hatch **Starts** racing from 1215hrs (qualifying from 0930hrs)

NOTE: SPECTATORS ARE NOT ADMITTED TO THESE EVENTS

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ART EDITOR MIKE STOKOE'S FAVOURITE OF THE WEEK!

Ian Baxendale's shot from the Hot Rod pits with Paul and Peter Grimer's Ford Escort Mk2s

Neil Ormston's classic from Le Mans 24 Hours

More from Neil Ormston: BTCC Mazda, 1993

Gary Hill enjoyed historics at Brands Hatch

David Harbey's pic: big effort at Goodwood

Goodwood Festival thrills, by Robert Taylor

NEXT WEEK — OUT THURSDAY, APRIL 8

READERS' Q&A:
KENNY ACHESON
Northern Irishman tackles the MN readers' posers head on

*Correct at time of going to press

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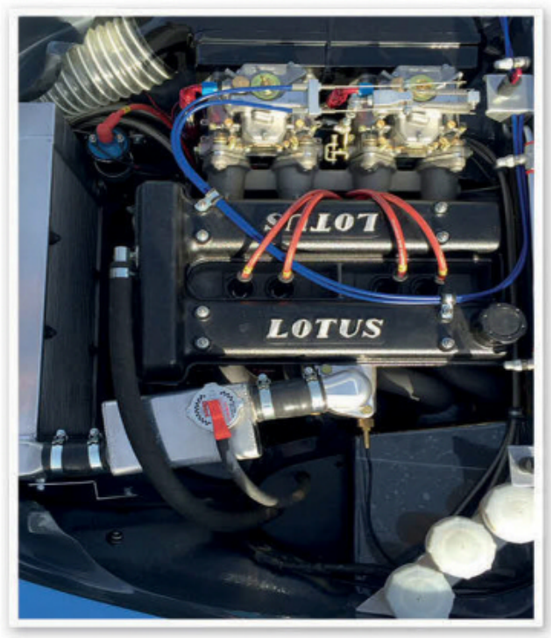

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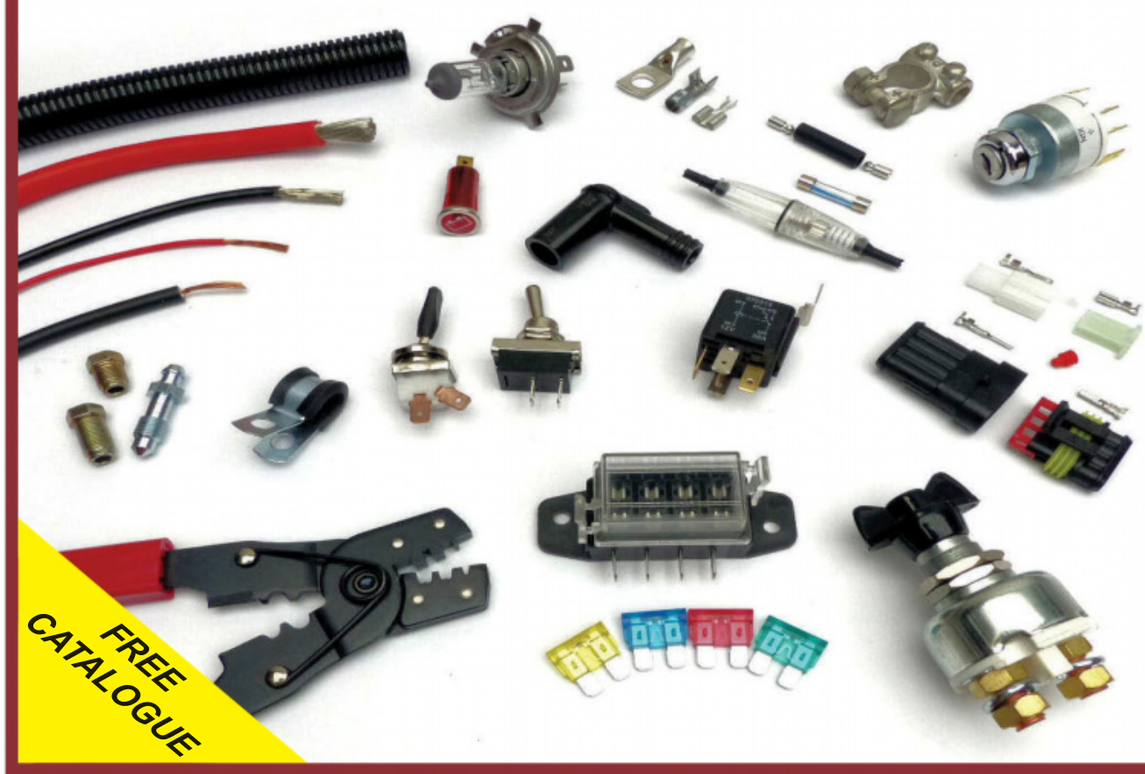

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